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# Rio Grande National Forest –DRAFT Wilderness Evaluations

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Forest Service

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# RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION PROCESS

## Step 2: Evaluation Draft Evaluation Criteria

The second step in the wilderness recommendation process is evaluation. In this step the inventoried land from step one is evaluated for wilderness character. Like in the inventory phase, there are guidelines for making this determination. In the case of evaluation, however, these guidelines are taken from the Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964 in the form of wilderness characteristics. While the categories defined in the Wilderness Preservation Act are broad in nature, there are considerations under each characteristic that help to narrow down each character trait. Table 1 on the following page describes those five categories of wilderness characteristics and additional considerations.

Through a series of meetings held in July 2016, interdisciplinary specialists from each Ranger District applied on-the-ground knowledge corresponding to the five wilderness categories to identify wilderness character for all wilderness inventory polygons. The final inventory and preliminary evaluation results were then presented to the public in late July at public meetings in La Jara, Saguache and South Fork. At that same time, the forest's interactive website was updated to make the additional preliminary evaluation results available. A comment period on the preliminary evaluation results closed on September 6, and those comments were then reviewed by the forest team on October 13, 2016 to further inform what areas might be taken into analysis.

The preliminary evaluation results are grouped into six categories representing the overall degree of wilderness character for a polygon:

- Low
- Low/Moderate
- Moderate
- Moderate/High
- High
- High-Upper Tier (UT).

TABLE 1. WILDERNESS CONSIDERATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Wilderness Characteristic	Considerations
<p><u>Characteristic 1: Apparent Naturalness</u></p> <p>Does the area generally appear to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable?</p>	<p>a. The composition of plant and animal communities. The purpose of this factor is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural (for example, past management activities have created a plantation style forest with trees of a uniform species and age that are planted in rows).</p> <p>b. The extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention.</p> <p>c. The extent to which improvements included in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness.</p>
<p><u>Characteristic 2: Opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation</u></p> <p>Does the area have outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation (one or the other, doesn't have to be both)?</p>	<p>a. Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area. Factors to consider may include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area.</p> <p>b. Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping and enjoying nature.</p>
<p><u>Characteristic 3: Size</u></p> <p>Is the area of sufficient size to practically manage it for its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition?</p>	<p>a. Consider areas less than 5,000 acres if they are adjacent to another wilderness area or an area proposed to be one.</p> <p>b. Consider primitive areas or areas that are part of another wilderness inventory on an adjacent land management agency unit.</p> <p>c. Consider if areas smaller than 5,000 acres can be combined.</p>
<p><u>Characteristic 4: Ecological, scientific, educational, scenic or historical values.</u></p> <p>Does the area contain ecological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value? These are not required to be present, but should be identified and evaluated where they exist.</p>	<p>a. Rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems. Rare can be determined locally, regionally, nationally or within the system of protected designations.</p> <p>b. Outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies or geologic features.</p> <p>c. Historic and cultural resource sites. (Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056)).</p> <p>d. Research natural areas.</p> <p>e. High-quality water resources or important watershed features.</p>

Wilderness Characteristic	Considerations
<u>Characteristic 5: Wilderness characteristics manageability</u>  Can the area be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics?	a. Shape and configuration of the area.  b. Legally established rights or uses within the area.  c. Specific federal or state laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics.  d. The presence and amount of non-federal land in the area.  e. Management of adjacent lands.

Notes :

- All acreages are approximate and rounded to the nearest 10 in the polygon descriptions.
- The Forest is using UTM acres as the official projection to display acreage numbers. This differs from the projection used in the inventory process. Differences in acres from the inventory to the evaluation phase are a reflection of this projection change and not a reflection of any change in the size of areas.
- In some cases polygon numbers are not consecutive (e.g. 13, 15, 18). This is a result of combining polygons during the inventory process. No acreage was eliminated or dropped in this process.

**TABLE 2. LIST OF DRAFT WILDERNESS EVALUATION  
POLYGONS, RANKINGS, AND UTM ACRE**

Polygon	Draft Evaluation Ranking	UTM_Acres
1.a	High	4064
1.b	Low	17
2	High	31827
3.a	High	750
3.b	High	1788
3.c	High	247
3.d	High	80
3.e	High	2467
3.f	High	453
3.g	Low	235
3.h	Low	912
3.i	Low	2119
4	Low/Mod	15782
5	Low	5049
6	Moderate	33074
7	Low	5710
8	Low/Mod	5677
9	Low/Mod	10356
10	Low	12061
11	Mod/High	6360
12	High-UT	14172
12	Mod/High	16309
13	Low	10656
15	Moderate	15843
18	Low/Mod	6131
20.a	Low	31269
20.a	High-UT	19049
20.a	Mod/High	22079
20.b	Low	35630
21	Low	357
22	Moderate	10445
23	Low	5108
24	High	115
25.a	Moderate	6792
25.a	Mod/High	4049
25.a	High-UT	17934

Polygon	Draft Evaluation Ranking	UTM_Acres
25.b	Moderate	1511
26	Moderate	7766
26	Low	17082
26	Mod/High	10967
26	High-UT	34340
27	Low	29743
28	Mod/High	18807
28	Low	13370
28	High-UT	31855
29	High	6370
30.a	Low	19
30.b	Low	5
30.c	Low	17
31	Low	138
32	Low	119
33	Low	957
34	Low	261
35	Low	1807
36.a	Low/Mod	6011
36.b	Low	3
37.a	Mod/High	3679
37.b	Mod/High	7849
38.a	Low/Mod	5376
38.a	High	31339
38.b	Moderate	6487
39	Low	11660
40	Low	11133
41	Moderate	45401
42	High	440
43.a	Moderate	6414
43.b	Moderate	645
44	Low/Mod	11901
45.a	Low	7768
45.b	Low	13761
46	Low/Mod	9527
49	Low	7585



Polygon	Draft Evaluation Ranking	UTM_Acres
50	Low	15725
51	Low	3403
51	Moderate	23223
51	Mod/High	51202
52	Low	18745
53	High	3774
54	Low	15
55	Low	3738
55	High-UT	3943
56	Low	12018
57	Low	2123
57	High	3334
58.a	Low	58
58.b	Low	3
58.c	Low	8
59	Moderate	36959
60	Low	5549
61	High	1554
62	Low	5908
63.a	Mod/High	34160
63.b	Moderate	204
63.c	Moderate	24
64	Low	26032
65	Low	2840
66	Low	1516

# CONEJOS PEAK RANGER DISTRICT

## **Polygon 1.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 4,060 acre area is located in the eastern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest on the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness along its northern border and BLM and undeveloped private land along its southern and western border. There is a popular 4WD road (NFSR 975 Mt. Blanca) that runs along the northern boundary adjacent to the area.

### *Apparent Naturalness*

The area closely mimics the apparent naturalness found in the adjacent Sangre de Cristo Wilderness. The area is characterized by rugged peaks and small high-mountain lakes. Plant composition and communities are similar to those found in the adjacent wilderness as high elevation plant communities give way to forests of oak, aspen and spruce at lower elevations. Few improvements or evidence of historic logging, thinning or other management activities can be found within this area that detract from its overall naturalness.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area offers both opportunities for solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation largely due to its adjacency to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness. There are approximately 2.4 miles of non-motorized trail within the area. A popular 4WD road is adjacent to this polygon that could detract from opportunities to experience solitude when motorized sounds are audible. Multiple peaks can be found in this area, providing opportunities to hike and climb in a remote and rugged setting.

### *Unique Features*

This area contains features of cultural significance including Mount Blanca which is sacred to the Navajo, Ute and Jicarilla Tribes. It is an important anchor point within the cultural landscape of the Upper Rio Grande pueblos. The peak marks the eastern boundary of the *Dinetah*, or Navajo homeland.

### *Manageability*

This area shares its northern border with the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness area and its southern border with a parcel of undeveloped private land managed with a Fish and Wildlife Service conservation easement. This area could be managed in conjunction with the adjacent wilderness area. Presence and extent of other uses in this area is minimal, making management to preserve the areas wilderness characteristics high throughout the area. Presence of a popular 3.3 mile 4WD road adjacent to the parcel could pose encroachment concerns from motorized vehicles. A private inholding in the north of the area could also pose management challenges related to access and use.

### **Polygon 1.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 20 acre area is located in the eastern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest on the Conejos Peak Ranger District in Alamosa County. The parcel is approximately 0.5 miles long and less than 0.1 miles wide. It is adjacent to the southwestern most point of the Sangre de Cristo wilderness adjacent to BLM land to the west. The popular Mt. Blanca BLM road (975) runs along its eastern boundary.

#### *Apparent Naturalness*

Due to its small size and proximity to roads and dispersed recreation activities, the area has a low degree of apparent naturalness.

#### *Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation*

Limited opportunities for solitude can be found within this area. Sounds from the popular 4WD road running along its eastern border can be heard throughout the area and could detract from the feeling of solitude and remoteness from civilization.

Limited opportunities exist for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities as this area does not offer ample area to escape from road and dispersed recreation developments and activities, and has established high 4WD use.

#### *Unique qualities*

No unique features are known to be within this area.

#### *Manageability*

It would be difficult to manage this area to preserve wilderness characteristics due to its small and narrow shape and proximity to a popular 4WD road. The adjacent roads could result in increased motorized trespass or impacts to solitude from motorized sounds.

## **SAGUACHE RANGER DISTRICT**

### **Polygon 2**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 31,830 acre area is located in the eastern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest in Saguache County, administered by the Saguache Ranger District. The entire area is adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness and includes four CRAs within its boundaries including the Hot Springs (500 acres), Cotton Creek (2,300 acres), Crestone (7,100 acres), and Pole Creek (1,000 acres) CRAs. The

Sangre de Cristo Mountains are this section's major landform feature and the area is characterized by steep, open mountainous slopes with westerly aspect and a few valley plains.

#### *Apparent Naturalness*

The majority of the area appears relatively natural, with a few exceptions in isolated areas. The area's long-term ecological processes are intact and operating. The area is within the Southern Parks and Rocky Mountain Ranges Eco-Section (M331F) with elevations ranging from 7,500 to 14,000 ft.

Vegetation ranges from oak brush in lower elevations to pinyon-juniper/chaparral in mid-elevations, to Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir in higher elevations with Aspen intermingled throughout.

The area provides habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and potential habitat for several Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, and wolverine. The area provides bighorn sheep habitat and mule deer and elk winter range and is a key area for bighorn sheep lambing and wintering sheep. Additionally, the Pole Creek CRA located in the southern portion of this area provides maternity roosts for Townsend's big-eared bat, a Forest Service Sensitive species.

In some areas, evidence of past prospecting, mining and timber harvest activities are noticeable, but do not detract from the overall apparent naturalness of the area. There are a few miner and trapper cabins scattered throughout the area as well as private lands and in-holdings, and Sand Creek Range Management Unit Allotment that may detract from naturalness in some areas as well.

#### *Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Overall, solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities can be found throughout this area. Several isolated areas experience high numbers of visitors during the summer and hunting season as well as fall and summer outfitter and guide use that could impact opportunities for solitude; However, due to the steep, rugged and remote nature of much of the area, a feeling of seclusion and inaccessibility can be experienced in many portions of this area throughout the year.

Much of the area is bordered by designated wilderness to the east, BLM wilderness study area and other BLM lands to the west, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve to the south, buffering much of the area from activities and developments that would impact opportunities for solitude.

Opportunities for primitive recreation can be found through the area including hiking, climbing, hunting, nature viewing and bird watching. The area includes three popular 14ers providing opportunities to experience a degree of challenge and primitive recreation in a rugged and remote environment.

#### *Unique Features*

The area is of importance to the Brazilian free-tailed bats that come from the Orient Mine colony as well as provides maternity roosts for Townsend's big-eared bat (sensitive).

Cultural and significant sites can be found throughout the area.

Within the Crestone CRA lies approximately 1,400 acres of the Mill Creek Research Natural Area. The Mill Creek RNA has extensive and high quality pinyon/juniper woodlands on the relatively gentle slopes of alluvial fans and steeper bedrock extending up to the 9,000 feet and are the principal feature of the area. Additionally, mixed conifer and subalpine forest extend up to treeline on Gibson Peak and

subalpine grasslands blend into higher elevation alpine vegetation above treeline. There are no trails within this area and receives minimal recreation use.

#### *Manageability*

Much of the area is bounded on the east by the Sangre de Cristo wilderness and on the west by a BLM wilderness study area making extension of current wilderness management practices practical in this area. The great Sand Dunes National Park and reserve border the southernmost portion of the area.

Presence and extent of other uses in this area is minimal, making management to preserve the areas wilderness characteristics high throughout the area. However, several exceptions exist that could make managing to preserve wilderness character difficult

There are several parcels of private land and in-holdings within this area that would pose management challenges as well as several “cherry stemmed” roads could result in increased motorized trespass or impacts to solitude from motorized sounds.

#### **Polygon 3a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 750 acre area is located in the eastern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest in Saguache County, administered by the Saguache Ranger District. The entire area is adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness to the east and private land to the west. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are this sections major landform feature and the area is characterized by steep, open mountainous slopes with a westerly aspect. Haydon Pass road FS970 is adjacent to the area and makes up its northwestern boundary.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The majority of the area appears relatively natural. The area’s long-term ecological processes are intact and operating similar to the adjacent Sangre de Cristo wilderness.

Vegetation ranges from oak brush in lower elevations to pinyon-juniper/chaparral in mid-elevations, to Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir in higher elevations with Aspen intermingled throughout.

Minimal evidence of past management activities can be seen throughout the area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in this area, especially away from private land and NFSR 997 (Silver Creek), which creates a “cherry stem” into the area.

#### *Unique Features*

The presence of limber and bristlecone pine populations are unique features in this area.

## *Management*

Adjacency to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness, minimal road or trail access, and few other established uses make managing to preserve wilderness character possible in this area. However, future management actions related to the adjacent private land to the west could impact wilderness character values at a later time.

### **Polygon 3.b and 3.c**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

These two areas total approximately 2,035 acres (3b. 1,788 acres and 3c. 247 acres) and are located approximately 22 miles east of the town of Saguache, in Saguache County, administered by the Saguache Ranger District. The areas are adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness on the north, south and eastern boundaries and adjacent to BLM and private land located along the western boundaries. The Miller Creek CRA makes up area 3b and is within the Southern Parks and Rocky Mountain Ranges Eco Section (M331F) with elevations ranging from 7500 to 14,000 feet. Both areas consist almost entirely of extremely steep terrain along the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, open mountainous slopes and drainages sloping to the west. Nearest access to the area are NFSR's 985 and 994.

#### *Apparent Naturalness*

The majority of the area appears natural with the exception of grazing activities and historical mining and timber harvest. The area is characterized by steep, open mountainous slopes with drainages sloping to the west. Vegetation ranges from oakbrush in the lower foothills to Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir intermingled with aspen in the higher elevations and a few grassy south-facing open slopes.

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and (Mexican spotted owl (threatened). The area also provides potential habitat for American marten, a Forest Service sensitive species. The few grassy south-facing open slopes provide good winter and summer range for deer and elk. The lower elevations are near the home range of the Poncha Pass Gunnison Sage Grouse population, and probably support the birds at points during the year.

The area is a part of the Alder-Forage Reserve Range Management Unit (RMU). Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements including fencing can be found in some areas.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined recreation*

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and unconfined recreation are high through the area. Because of the steep and rugged terrain, distance from roads and a lack of Forest trails, a feeling of remoteness and seclusion can be experienced throughout much of the area. Other than potential motorized sounds from grazing management activities, the sounds of nature dominate the landscape. Recreation use is very minimal.

### *Unique Qualities*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character is possible throughout majority of the area with the exception of challenges related to livestock grazing activities including authorized motorized/mechanized uses and range improvements.

Further management challenges could arise as limited road access could make it difficult to access the area if wilderness regulation enforcement, monitoring, or treatment of weeds were needed. However, due to its rugged terrain and limited access, its natural character and recreation setting can likely be preserved.

### **Polygon 3.d, 3.e and 3.f**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/Location*

These three adjacent areas total approximately 3,000 acres (3.d 80, 3.e 2,467, 3.f 453 acres) and are located approximately 22 miles east of the town of Saguache, in Saguache County. The areas are administered by the Saguache Ranger District. All three areas are adjacent to the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness with BLM lands located along the western boundary.

The Butterfly CRA makes up the entirety of polygons 3d and 3e. The areas are within the Southern Parks and Rocky Mountain Ranges Eco Section (M331F) with elevations ranging from 7500 to 14,000 feet, and consists almost entirely of extremely steep terrain along the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, with open mountainous slopes and drainages sloping to the west. Several Forest roads provide access to the area including level 2 maintenance NFSR's; 994 (Raspberry Cr.), 993 (Eaglebrook), 992 (Butterfly Cr.), 982 (Rock Creek), 980 (Rock Gulch) and 948(North Decker).

### *Apparent Naturalness*

The majority of the area appears natural with the exception of grazing activities and numerous historical mining sites. The area is characterized by steep, open mountainous slopes with drainages sloping to the west. Vegetation ranges from oakbrush in the lower foothills to Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir intermingled with aspen in the higher elevations and a few grassy south-facing open slopes.

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and (Mexican spotted owl (threatened). The area also provides potential habitat for American marten, a Forest Service sensitive species. The few grassy south-facing open slopes provide good winter and summer range for deer and elk. The lower elevations are near the home range of the Poncha Pass Gunnison Sage Grouse population, and likely support the birds at points during the year.

The southernmost portion of 3e and all of 3d are within the Alder-Forage Reserve Range Management Unit (RMU). Livestock grazing occurs but there are currently no range improvements.

Patented mines are found in the vicinity of Rock Creek and prospect holes are common throughout that area. These improvements represent a departure from naturalness in some areas but do not detract from areas overall appearance of naturalness.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined recreation*

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and unconfined recreation are high through the area. Because of the steep and rugged terrain and a lack of Forest trails, recreation use is minimal and a feeling of remoteness and seclusion can be experienced throughout much of the area. Where roads are adjacent to the area or lead into the area (cherry stemmed), sounds of motorized vehicles could impact a visitor's sense of solitude, interrupt the sounds of nature, and provide a traveler with signs of nearby civilization.

#### *Unique Qualities*

Gambel Oak communities and traditional and cultural sites can be found here, adding to the unique qualities of this area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character is possible throughout majority of the area with the exception of challenges related to livestock grazing activities including authorized motorized/mechanized use for potential future range improvements as well as the presence of a private inholding.

Further management challenges could arise from the presence of "cherry stemmed" and adjacent roads which could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area. However, due to its rugged terrain, lack of Forest trails, and adjacency to the Sangre de Cristo wilderness, its natural character and recreation setting could likely be preserved. Additional information is needed regarding the ditch location, transplanted BHS, and Hunts Peak considerations.

### **Polygons 3g, 3h and 3i**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

These three areas total approximately 3,270 acres (3.g 235, 3.h 912, 3.i 2,119 acres) and are located four miles east of Poncha Pass, in Saguache County. It is administered by the Saguache Ranger District. The area surrounds the northernmost lobe of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness on three sides. Its western boundary is adjacent to BLM and private land and its northern boundary is the Pike/San Isabel National Forest. The southern and western boundaries of the area are bordered by NFSR 990 (Dorsey Creek) and NFSR 991 (San Luis Creek) roads. The entire evaluation area is also identified as the Dorsey Creek CRA. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are this areas major landform feature and is characterized by steep, open mountain slopes with drainages sloping to the west.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Much of the area is relatively close to roads, private land and ongoing management activities. However, much of the area appears relatively natural, with the exception of current grazing improvements and past prospecting, mining, and timber harvest. The area provides an extension of relatively unfragmented



and undisturbed habitats and serves as a wildlife corridor connecting the Sangre de Cristo mountain range with other alpine areas of the state. The area provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and Mexican spotted owl (threatened). The area also provides potential habitat for Forest Service sensitive species including: bighorn sheep, American marten, and goshawk. The lower elevations are near the home range of the Poncha Pass Gunnison sage grouse population, and likely support the birds during the year. Impacts from past and current use affect the apparent naturalness of this area. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements including fencing and water developments can be found in the area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

While the area can provide some opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, it would be difficult to get out of the range of noises and other impacts from adjacent roads, nearby recreation, firewood cutting, ATV use, and authorized motorized access and improvements for grazing activities. The western area is easily accessible and there is a very limited sense of remoteness or solitude, while the eastern area is more remote. There are approximately 3 miles of non-motorized trail that receive heavy day use, further impacting opportunities for solitude. The area is popular for elk hunting, firewood gathering, and general recreation activities.

#### *Unique Features*

There are no known unique features in this area.

#### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to the area would make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. Current grazing management activities allow for motorized access and mechanized equipment to maintain grazing developments such as fences and water developments within the area.

Additionally, ATV use is a well-established use for hunting, firewood gathering and general recreation. ATV use, as well as the close proximity to roads would pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

Adjacent private land and private land access could further impede management of the area to preserve wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygon 4**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low to Moderate** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 15,780 acre area is located in Saguache County and is administered by the Saguache Ranger District. The area is bordered by private and BLM lands on both the east and west sides. The west side includes the town of Bonanza and the Bonanza Historic Mining District. Much of the area (10,500 acres) is within the upper tier, Elkhorn Peak CRA. The area encompasses the high points of Elkhorn and Hayden Peaks and several of the drainages radiating from these peaks. NFSR 56 (Peterson Creek road) borders the eastern portions of the area and NFSR 873 (Kelly Cr. Road) falls within the area,

but is closed above the Forest boundary. This area has several National Forest System trails passing through it including; NFST 923, 924, and 925. There are two 4-wheel drive roads that extend to the western edge of the area; NFSR 888 (Greenback Gulch) and 867 (Eagle Gulch). The area is within the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area is steep, and bisected by a north-south ridge. Drainages run east and west.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Historical mining, timber harvest, private land, private land inholdings, and roading occur throughout the area and represent a departure from apparent naturalness.

Plant communities appear relatively natural with representations of ponderosa pine in the lower elevations, Douglas-fir in mid-elevations, and alpine associations at higher elevations. Aspen stands occur in areas burned in the past.

The area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). Potential for lynx occurrence in the area, however, is low. The area also provides potential habitat for American marten and wolverine, both Forest Service sensitive species, as well as valuable deer and elk winter range. Elkhorn Gulch and Kelly Creek contain networks of beaver ponds and support brook trout fisheries.

Improvements associated with current and past management detract from overall naturalness. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in some portions of the area, but are limited by existing uses as well as current and past improvements found throughout the area. The presence of roads, range improvements, and mining infrastructure, coupled with the sounds of motorized vehicles or equipment detract from a feeling of remoteness from civilization in some places.

However, in areas away from improvements and current uses, like in the rugged Elkhorn and Hayden Peaks area, a feeling of seclusion and remoteness can be experienced as well as a high degree of self-reliance, challenge and risk.

There are several non-motorized trails that access the area and outfitter and guide activities occur during the fall, but use is not high and generally would not impact opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation overall.

#### *Unique Features*

No known unique features are found within the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics may be difficult in this area. Private and private land inholdings, existing authorized use of motorized equipment for range improvements, proximity to an established OHV loop, sounds from nearby road 285, and future fire and potential mining activities all make managing for wilderness characteristics challenging in this area. Several patented and unpatented

mines are within and adjacent to the area and could, should mineral activity and discovery occur in the future, change the areas character.

Presence of adjacent and cherry stemmed roads could result in motorized trespass or impacts to solitude from motorized sounds. Additionally, a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) occurs on the western boundary near the town of Bonanza, which falls within the Northern Saguache County FPD CWPP. Potential fire suppression activities related to proximity to a WUI, where fire is not desired and would likely be suppressed using motorized and mechanized means, could also make managing for wilderness characteristics difficult.

## **Polygon 5**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,050 acre area is located in Saguache County and is administered by the Saguache Ranger District. Its eastern boundary is BLM and private lands. Its northern boundary is defined by NFSR 890 (Round MTN) and its southern boundary by NFSR 892 (Rawley MTN). A central feature of the area is Burnt Mountain.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The degree to which the area appears natural is low due to historical mining, timber harvest, private land, private land inholdings, and roading which occur in the area.

Vegetation ranges from ponderosa pine in the lower elevations, Douglas-fir in mid-elevations, and alpine associations at higher elevations. Aspen stands occur in areas burned in the past.

Improvements associated with current and past management detract from overall naturalness. Livestock grazing associated with the Alder-Silver range management allotment occurs and range improvements can be found in the area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in some portions of the area, but are limited by existing uses as well as current and past improvements found throughout the area. While there are no trails or roads within the area, the presence of range improvements, and mining infrastructure, coupled with the sounds of motorized vehicles from adjacent roads, detract from a feeling of remoteness from civilization.

OHV use is popular on adjacent northern and southern roads and could detract from the sounds of nature. Visitors to the area can hear motorized sounds from nearby highway 285.

### *Unique Features*

No known unique features are found within the area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics may be difficult in this area. Private and private land inholdings, existing authorized use of motorized equipment for range improvements, proximity to an established OHV loop, sounds from nearby road 285, and future fire and potential mining activities all make managing for wilderness characteristics challenging in this area.

Presence of adjacent roads could result in motorized trespass or impacts to solitude from motorized sounds.

### **Polygon 6**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 33,070 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. Its northern border is the Continental Divide shared with the Gunnison National Forest and the northwest boundary is shared with the Pike and San Isabel national Forests. The southern boundary is BLM mixed with some private lands and the eastern and western boundaries are Forest Service lands. Several roads provide access to the area including: NFSR 860 (Indian Park), along its southwestern border and NFSR 880 (Findley Gulch) in the southeast portion of the area. Approximately 22,800 acres of the area makes up the Antora Meadows-Bear Creek upper tier CRA and is within the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110. The area is characterized by drainages running through steep narrow canyons with some mountain parks found throughout.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Much of the area appears relatively natural with exceptions in areas affected by some current and past management activities.

Vegetation is bunchgrass/ponderosa pine in lower elevations, some lodgepole pine in mid-elevations, and spruce/fir at high elevations. There is some subalpine and alpine vegetation along the Continental Divide.

The area has long-term intact, and functioning ecological processes and hosts an array of habitats from sagebrush to alpine tundra, and provides habitat or potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and the Mexican spotted owl. Although a low-use area for lynx, it does border or contribute to the Poncha Pass Lynx Linkage area and lynx have been known to pass through. The area also provides habitat for the following forest service sensitive species: American marten, bighorn sheep, wolverine (along the Continental Divide), and goshawk. Additionally, Blue grouse have been documented and the area provides deer and elk winter habitat as well as refuge for deer and elk from adjacent hunting pressure.

However evidence of historic timber harvest, patented mining claims, and small scale sawmills and homestead sites from the late 1800s and early 1900's, a 4.5 mile gas pipeline and current range management infrastructure, including fence and water developments, detract from naturalness in some areas.

Additional improvements in the area that may detract from naturalness include; 31.6 miles of non-motorized trails, 2.4 miles of motorized trail, and 1.3 miles of level 1 (closed) roads

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can generally be found in the area but are impacted by a variety of management and use factors. While a sense of remoteness can be experienced in the northwest portion of the area near Antero Peak due to limited vehicle access, other areas, like in the south near Middle Creek Road, may have diminished sense of remoteness due to nearby traffic.

Additionally, some areas experience high use during hunting season, like Antora Meadows, while other areas and seasons see very minimal use, making opportunity for solitude vary depending on location and time of year.

Improvements from private inholdings and current and past management activity also impact a travelers' ability to experience solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. Encountering grazing developments like fence and water improvements and hearing motorized sounds from authorized motorized/mechanized use for maintenance of range improvements detract from these opportunities. Additionally, a gas pipeline and active mining activity could also detract from solitude and primitive recreation opportunities.

#### *Unique Features*

Several unique features are noted within the area.

The upper reaches of the East Middle Creek boast an introduced population of pure Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The streams in the area, including West Middle Creek, the main stem of Middle Creek, and Indian Creek, support sport fisheries of brook and brown trout in a network of beaver bonds.

A portion of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail is located along the northern border.

A high degree of scenic values are also noted for the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character may be difficult due to the number and type of established uses found in the area.

Private inholdings, popular motorized trails, authorized motorized/mechanized maintenance of range and pipelines, active mineral patents in the Antora Meadows area, a variety of adjacent land ownerships, and the potential for further mineral activity in the future pose challenges for managing to preserve the areas wilderness characteristics.

However, the western portion of the area offers the greatest opportunity to manage for wilderness values due to its remoteness and natural condition.

### **Polygon 7**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,710 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. The area is adjacent to BLM and private land along its northeaster and southeastern boundary and NFSR along its southern, western and northwester boundaries.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Due to activities (some additional specialist input needed) and infrastructure associated with mining activity and private inholdings, the overall degree to which the area appears natural and affected primarily by the forces of nature is low.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to proximity to roads, infrastructure and activities associated with mining activity, and private inholdings, the overall opportunity to experience solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation is low.

### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be within the area.

### *Manageability*

Managing the area to preserve wilderness characteristics may be difficult. Adjacency to private Lands, presence of private land inholdings, and close proximity to adjacent roads pose management challenges related to access, motorized trespass, motorized sounds, presence and continued maintenance of improvements, and the overall ability to preserve the areas wilderness characteristics.

## **Polygon 8**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low to Moderate** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,680 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. The area is entirely surrounded by roads, BLM and private land. The area boundaries are defined by NFSR 857 (Little Kerber) which makes up the northern boundary, NFSR 858 (Sawlog Gulch) which makes up the western boundary, NFSR 852 (Ute Creek) and 842 (Saguache Creek) which make up the southern and eastern boundary. The southwestern corner of the area is BLM land.

### *Apparent naturalness*

In general, this area has a low degree of apparent naturalness. Mining activities in particular are prevalent throughout the area and represent a departure from naturalness.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in some areas, though closeness to and sounds from adjacent roads (including “cherry stem” NRSR 847), presence of private

land inholdings, mining activities and timber management on adjacent lands may detract from a traveler's sense of remoteness and ability to experience solitude.

No NFS roads or trails are in the area, so opportunity exists to experience primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities like hunting or hiking. However, during hunting season, visitor use is high in some places and may detract from these opportunities as crowding and displacement may occur.

#### *Unique Features*

No known unique features are found in this area.

#### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to this area may make managing to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. Adjacent and "cherry stem" roads may increase the likelihood of vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass. Private land inholdings detract from naturalness and undeveloped qualities managed for in wilderness areas. And the presence of mining, including future mining activity would pose additional challenges in preserving the areas wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygon 9**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low/Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This 10,360 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest, approximately five miles north of the town of Saguache in Saguache County. The area is administered by the Saguache Ranger District. Adjacent lands include private, Forest Service and BLM administered lands.

NFSR's 852 (Ute Creek), 842 (Saguache Peak), 872 (Noland Gulch), and several private and BLM roads provide access to the area.

The Ute Pass upper tier CRA (8,700 acres) is located within the area and lies within the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area is characterized by rugged topography with granite boulders.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Much of the area appears natural with the exception of an electrical transmission line through the western corner, some past mining, roading, timber harvest activity, a few old homestead sites, and several private in-holdings which all represent departures from naturalness. Additionally, livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing and water developments.

Vegetation is dry grassland/pinyon-juniper in lower elevations, ponderosa pine in mid-elevations, and spruce/fir intermixed with aspen at higher elevations.

The areas long-term ecological processes are intact and functioning and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). While the area is considered a low use area by lynx, it could be important in movement north to south from the Poncha Pass Lynx linkage.

The area is a special wildlife area for bighorn sheep who are believed to have died off, but is still considered good potential bighorn habitat and also contains important winter range for deer and elk.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to the rugged, steep rocky slopes that characterize the area, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found with some exceptions. Areas near private land inholdings, power lines, range improvements and their motorized authorizations, or “cherry stem” and adjacent roads, could detract from a feeling of remoteness from civilization and interrupt the sounds of nature.

Due to these uses and improvements, the area has little seclusion in the western portion of the area, but some feeling of seclusion and inaccessibility can be experienced in the east end where there is sufficient distance and screening to provide for these opportunities.

#### *Unique Features*

Two unique features have been noted for the area; bighorn sheep and old growth pinyon-juniper stands.

#### *Manageability*

Managing the area to preserve wilderness characteristics would be difficult in this area. The Ute Pass area is surrounded by private and BLM land on the north, east, and south sides. There are two internal private inholdings in Schecker Gulch and Asterhouse Gulch. The Saguache Peak electronics site is also on the western edge of the area. Additionally, adjacent roads and cherry stemmed roads could result in vehicle incursions and motorized trespass.

### **Polygon 10**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 12,060 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. It is adjacent to the Gunnison National Forest to the north, and a small section of BLM land in the south.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

In general, apparent naturalness in the area is low. Evidence of past vegetation treatments, including roller chopped areas (1980's) and gated and closed roads (1.3 miles) can be found in places throughout the area. There are many small-diameter lodgepole pine trees, evidence of past logging activity.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in this area with some exceptions related to the presence of motorcycle trails in the north end of the area and high hunting use during hunting season elsewhere.



### *Unique Features*

There are no unique features known to be in the area.

### *Manageability*

Due to current and past management activities (vegetation treatments, roading, horse and cattle grazing) as well as the presence of adjacent roads, motorized trails, private inholdings and areas of high hunting use, managing for wilderness characteristics may be difficult in this area. Vehicle trespass and motorized incursions could occur from the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

## **Polygon 11**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate/High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 6,360 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. Its northern boundary is defined by the Divide Trail and represents a division between the Rio Grande National Forest and the adjacent Gunnison National Forest. Its southern and eastern borders are defined by NFSR 740 (Four Mile) and 740.1e (Ross Basin)

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area is characterized by Engelmann Spruce and Arizona Fescue plant communities on mountain slopes and supports some old growth Douglas fir. Steep and rugged topography have limited previous management activities, protecting apparent naturalness in those areas. However, naturalness is impacted in areas affected by grazing activities and improvements, and NFSR 738.1a (Buck Park) in the north.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Overall, the area provides a high degree of opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation with a few exceptions. NFSR's 738 and 738.1a represent a 3 mile long "cherry stem" into the area. Cherry stem roads may reduce opportunities for solitude by introducing motorized sounds and evidence of civilization when encountered by a visitor.

However, away from roads and trails that make up the perimeter of the area, steep and rugged terrain and the absence of any interior trails, provides a high degree of solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

### *Unique Features*

Two unique features are noted for the area. The Divide Trail and proposed Continental Divide National Scenic Trail reroute, are unique and nationally meaningful trails in the area.

Old growth Douglas fir in the area represents a unique natural resource present in the area.

### *Manageability*

Overall, the ability to manage for wilderness characteristics is moderate in the area with some exceptions due to current grazing and some issues with adjacent and cherry stemmed roads.

Topography precludes much risk of motorized incursions, but sounds from adjacent roads and a 3 mile cherry stem road could present challenges when managing for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.

### **Polygon 12**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has mostly **High-UT** degree of wilderness character (14,170 acres), within the upper tier of the two CRA's, and **Moderate/High** (16,310 acres) mostly outside the CRA boundaries.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 30,480 acre area is located in Saguache County. It is on the Rio Grande National Forest and is administered by Saguache Ranger. The area is bordered on the east by BLM land, and a few private parcels, and on the northern and western boundaries by RGNF lands prescribed to be managed for recreation and general forest activities. The area is dissected into several distinct parts by NFSR's 736 (Duckfoot Creek), 761 (Lost Spring), and 740 (Four Mile), and by NFST 776 (Saguache Creek).

Taylor Canyon and Four Mile Creek upper tier CRA's are found within the area and are unique in the Saguache District for their topography and habitat types. They encompass an extremely rugged, lower-elevation area of rocky fin-shaped ridges separated by small meadows and canyons in between. The majority of these areas sit in the 9,000 to 9,500 foot elevation range, with the highest points along rims of the Saguache Creek canyon reaching above 10,600 feet.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The general landscape is relatively natural in appearance. Much of the area is within the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with ponderosa pine in the lower foothills, and Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir at higher mountainous terrain. Several portions of the area have had extensive natural fires between 80-150 years ago that have shaped vegetation communities.

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. The two upper tier CRA's within this area form part of a large unfragmented and undisturbed area important for maintaining the ecological health of the habitat used by many terrestrial, aquatic and avian species. The area provides habitat for federally listed species such as Canada lynx (threatened), and Mexican spotted owl (threatened). The area also provides habitat for Forest Service Sensitive species such as bighorn sheep, American marten (documented occurrence) and goshawk (nesting documented). Peregrine falcons also use the area.

Historical mining and timber harvest are evident in some areas and current grazing management activities, especially constructed range features in the west, may detract from apparent naturalness. Additionally, there are 4.7 miles of level one (closed) roads within the area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Some portions of the area provide a high degree of solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation with the exception of some locations impacted by current grazing management, trailed areas, and sounds from adjacent roads.

There are approximately 21 miles of non-motorized trail in the area, and while an acceptable improvement in wilderness, do represent evidence of civilization and can serve to concentrate recreation use. In addition, several roads create small cherry stems into the area or are directly adjacent to the area, increasing the possibility of hearing motorized sounds.

Grazing activities, especially in the western portion of the area, may also detract from a feeling of solitude and remoteness from civilization when motorized sounds from authorized use are heard or when authorized improvements, like fencing, are encountered.

Opportunities for solitude are greatest in the central and eastern portions of the area.

### *Unique Features*

Several unique features were noted for this area including: cultural properties, fens, and one reach of Saguache wild and Scenic River eligible located within the evaluation area.

### *Manageability*

Overall, the ability to manage for wilderness characteristics is high in the area with some exceptions.

Current grazing activities, including motorized access and current and future constructed range features, are allowed in the area, but generally only affect isolated areas in the west.

Other challenges to managing the area as wilderness include presence of a private inholding, and challenges associated with adjacent land ownership and cherry stemmed roads.

## **Polygon 13**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 10,660 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. BLM lands border the area on the north, west and southern boundaries. RGNF lands prescribed to be managed for General Forest and Rangelands-Forest Vegetation Emphasis, make up the lands to the east of the evaluation area. There is also a small section of privately owned land in the east. Several NFS and BLM roads provide access to the area including NFSR 706 (Laughlin gulch), 704 (South Tracy), 590 (Tracy Fork), 620 (Fullerton Park), 146 (Mill Basin), 621 (San Juan) and BLMR 446 (Tracy).

### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness is low throughout the area. Past and current grazing activities, including fence and water improvements represent a departure from natural conditions. In addition, there are 3.7 miles of level one (closed) roads within the evaluation area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are low throughout the area. Grazing management activities and infrastructure, as well as cherry stemmed and adjacent roads, may impact a visitors ability to travel unconfined throughout the area or experience solitude in an environment free from motorized sounds. In addition, some areas receive high visitor use during hunting season, potentially impacting opportunities for solitude in those areas.

### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to exist in this area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics would be difficult in this area. Current grazing management practices and current and future grazing improvements pose challenges to managing for wilderness values.

Where not precluded by topography, the presence of adjacent and cherry stemmed roads may lead to motorized trespass or impacts to solitude from motorized sounds.

## **Polygon 15**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 15,840 acre area is located approximately 12 miles southwest of the town of Saguache, in Saguache County. The area is administered by the Saguache Ranger District, Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF). BLM lands border the area on the north, east and southern boundaries. Several parcels of State and private land are adjacent to the area as well. RGNF lands prescribed to be managed for General Forest and Rangelands-Forest Vegetation Emphasis, make up the lands to the east of the evaluation area. The majority of the area is made up of the upper tier Sawlog CRA (10,500 acres).

Access to the area is via Lime Creek and Bredell Creek from BLM, and 41.G (North Carnero), Poison Gulch, Sawlog Gulch, 675 (South Fork), and 2B (Royal Gulch via Mexican Park) and 623 (Fullerton Park) from Forest Service lands.

The area is characterized by gently rolling hills to steep rocky outcrops. Drainages run primarily to the south.

### *Apparent naturalness*

In general, much of the area appears relatively natural, with the exception of areas adjacent to constructed developments, inholdings, historic mining, timber harvest, and old roads.

Vegetation is comprised of pinyon/juniper in lower elevations, ponderosa pine at mid-elevation, and spruce/fir intermingled with aspen at higher elevations. Small to large bunchgrass parks are found throughout. The Sawlog and Poison Gulch portions of the area are characterized by very large, open expanses of grasslands on the south-facing slopes and dense conifer stands on the north-facing slopes.

The area is a part of the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110.

The area had been heavily roaded with four-wheel drive tracks made by hunters and wood gatherers, and while those have been closed and obliterated, some closed road encroachment still exists and the roads continue to be evident on the landscape. In addition, there are 2.6 miles of level 1 (closed) roads in the area.

The area had also been used for sheep grazing for many years and has affected forb composition and potential. In addition, current grazing management associated with the Sawlog and San Juan Maez cattle and horse allotments, includes fencing and some water developments that represent a departure from natural conditions.

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). Lynx presence in the CRA is documented. Additionally, the area provides habitat and or potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, and goshawk. This is a key big game area and contains important year-round range for elk and deer. The area encompasses a large portion of the watershed of North Carnero Creek and contains approximately 1.3 miles of North Carnero Creek which hosts a wild population of pure Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and an introduced population of Rio Grande sucker.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found within the area, with some exceptions related to roading, private land, and grazing activities.

Where roads are adjacent to the area or lead into the area (cherry stems) or when motorized sounds from authorized range management activities can be heard, these motorized sounds may impact a visitors sense of solitude and remoteness.

Where a visitor encounters constructed features like fence and water developments, inholdings or old roads, these encounters may take away from a feeling of remoteness or may impede primitive and unconfined travel.

However, solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can still be found away from developments and motorized sounds. The limited access to the area (approximately 4.1 miles of non-motorized trails) can provide users a feeling of seclusion and inaccessibility.

#### *Unique Features*

Two unique features are noted for this area: The presence of Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and important cultural features are present in the area.

#### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to this area could pose some challenges to managing for wilderness characteristics.

Adjacent and “cherry stem” roads as well as user created 4WD roads, could lead to increased vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass in the area. Closed road encroachment is currently a management challenge that would likely continue to be an issue in the future.

Private land inholdings and associated land owner traffic as well as proposed vegetation treatments outside the CRA, may detract from naturalness and undeveloped qualities managed for in wilderness areas.

## **Polygon 18**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low/Moderate** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 6,130 acre area is located in the northern part of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Saguache Ranger District in Saguache County. The area is completely surrounded by RGNF lands with the exception of two parcels in the south.

Access to the area is provided by several NFSR’s including 41G (Carnero) along the eastern boundary, 675 (South Carnero) along the south and western boundary, 684 (Deer Creek) along the northern boundary and 685 (Cecilia Creek) in the north.

Several developed recreation sites are adjacent to the area. Storm King Campground is located just outside the boundary in the east and Poso group picnic site is located just outside the boundary in the south.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Due to past vegetation treatments, constructed features, and approximately 2.3 miles of level one roads, there is generally a low degree of apparent naturalness in the area.

Grazing occurs in the area as a part of the Cave Creek and Carnero cattle and horse allotments, further detracting from apparent naturalness where range improvement exist or vegetative communities have been visibly altered.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Adjacent roads and developed recreation sites, as well as private land, grazing and hunting activity limit opportunities to experience solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation in the area.

### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be within this area.

### *Manageability*

Several factors make managing for wilderness character difficult in this area. The shape of the evaluation area is irregular with many very narrow lobes. Adjacent roads, especially near narrow sections, may result in vehicle incursions or motorized trespass as well as motorized sounds being audible when in the area. Proposed vegetation treatments in and adjacent to the area could pose additional management challenges depending on specific treatments.

## Polygon 20a

Preliminary Evaluation Result: For the portion of this area that falls within the upper tier CRAs, there is **High-UT** (19,050 acres) and **Moderate/High** (22,080 acres) degree of wilderness character. For areas outside the CRA and further from La Garita Wilderness (approximately 31,270 acres), a **Low** degree of wilderness character is found.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 72,400 acre area is a large irregular shaped area located within the Saguache and Rio Grande Counties administered by the Divide and Saguache Ranger Districts on the Rio Grande National Forest. The western boundary of the area is adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness which is administered by the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG).

Three upper tier CRAs are found within this area including: Lake Fork, Sheep Mountain, and Deep Creek/Boot Mountain CRAs.

Many roads provide access to the area. In the west, NFSR 744 (Middle Fork Saguache), 776.1b (North Fork), and 787.3c (Fish Pond); in the central portion of the area, NFSR 787 (Saguache Park); and from the south, NFSR 640 (Embargo Creek) provide access to the area. There are several smaller roads or sections of roads that surround and create cherry stems into the area.

The landscape in and around the Deep Creek-Boot Mountain CRA is characterized by deep narrow canyons, steep slopes, and alpine plateaus. It is dissected by four major drainages: Wannamaker, Bear, Deep, and Johns Creeks which run to the north. Boot Mountain is high, mountainous terrain with mature and pole sized Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands with interspersed open parks. There are inclusions of aspen, subalpine and alpine associations.

The Lake Fork CRA and surrounding areas are characterized by a large plateau in the north, with drainages running primarily to the east and north. It is dissected by several drainages including Lake Fork Saguache Creek, Miners Creek, North Fork Saguache Creek, and several minor drainages. The northern area is gently to moderately sloping. Vegetation is mainly spruce/fir associations with aspen stands and mountains.

The Sheep Mountain CRA lies along an extremely rugged ridge top. Drainages run east and west into Saguache Creek. The area is a high plateau with steep sides. Vegetation is predominately spruce/fir with aspen stringers and small parks. Sheep Mountain CRA and Lake Fork CRA are partially contiguous and both are adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness area in the Saguache Park area. The Sheep Mountain CRA consists almost exclusively of dense subalpine timber on steep slopes.

### *Apparent naturalness*

In general, the area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes. Apparent naturalness can be found to a high degree in some areas with exceptions in places where evidence of past timber harvest, mining, roading and grazing activities have occurred.

This large and diverse area provides habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and southwest willow flycatcher (endangered), and potential habitat for Forest Service sensitive species: American marten, wolverine, boreal owl and goshawk. Other documented species include moose,



American three-toed woodpeckers, marten, hermit thrush, brown creeper, blue grouse and ptarmigan. High quality deer/elk winter habitat and security areas can be found throughout the area.

Several types of improvements detract from naturalness within the evaluation area. There are approximately 24 level 1 (closed) roads that total 8.5 miles, private in-holdings, motorized trails, and range improvements, including fence and water developments that represent a departure from natural conditions. Evidence of past mining also detract from the apparent naturalness of the area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found to a high degree in some areas with the exception of those places close to roads, in-holdings, motorized trails, or campgrounds.

There are approximately 35.4 miles of motorized trail, mostly in the Boot Mountain area, that could impact opportunities for solitude due to motorized sounds. However, the Deep Creek, Sheep Mountain and Lake Fork areas are rugged, steep and have few trails or roads through them, providing opportunities to experience a sense of seclusion and remoteness. The portion of the evaluation area that is adjacent to La Garita wilderness has a high degree of opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, as well as those areas that have steep and rugged terrain with minimal trail or road access.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be within this area.

#### *Manageability*

Due to the large and diverse nature of this evaluation area, the ability to manage for wilderness characteristics varies based on location. In some areas managing for wilderness values is possible and in other areas would be difficult.

In the Lake Fork CRA and surrounding areas:

This area is adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness along the western and southern boundaries. It is dissected by several drainages including Lake Fork Saguache Creek, Miners Creek, North Fork Saguache Creek, and several minor drainages. The southern portion of the area could potentially be managed in conjunction with the adjacent Wilderness, as its wilderness character is mostly intact. The northern half is not as easily managed for wilderness character, as it contains primitive roads in and near Miners Creek and North Fork Saguache Creek. The northern area is gently to moderately sloping, and access is found along the northern boundary on NFSR 776 which is accessible by ATVs and 4WDs. In addition, grazing occurs in the area and motorized access is allowed for range improvements presenting additional management challenges.

In the Sheep Mountain CRA and surrounding areas:

Parts of this area are contiguous to the Lake Fork upper tier CRA and adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness. Due to the extremely rugged terrain, this area could likely be managed to preserve wilderness character. There are no range improvements in the area and motorized access is not permitted. There are also no private in holdings. However, several cherry stemmed roads in the area could lead to management challenges related to motorized trespass or motorized sounds.



In the Deep Creek/Boot Mountain CRA and surrounding areas:

The presence of private inholdings, including the Sky City Mining District, a large multiple-owner inholding and the La Garita Stock Driveway (ATV Route) may make it difficult to preserve wilderness character within this area. While much of the terrain is steep and inaccessible, the large private inholding, motorized ATV use, and potential for timber activity north of Bowers Peak conflicts with managing the area for its wilderness values. In the Boot Mountain area there is a high concentration of motorized trails and well established motorized use that could make managing for wilderness character difficult.

## SAGUACHE AND DIVIDE RANGER DISTRICTS

### **Polygon 20b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This irregular shaped area is approximately 35,630 acres, located in Saguache County administered by the Divide Ranger District of the Rio Grande National Forest. Boundaries are adjacent to Forest Service lands managed primarily for recreation and general forest activities. State, BLM and private lands are adjacent to the eastern boundary. General access to this area is from NFSR 670 (la Garita); NFSR 646 (Pinyon) and NFSR 795 (Colbran Canyon) on its eastern boundary; NFSR 650.I (lone Rock) and NFSR 650 (Embargo) on its west boundary and NFSR 673 on its northern boundary. Two NFSTs (787 and 793) are located in this area and are open to motorized use (motorcycles and ATVs).

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area's landscape is relatively natural appearing, although private inholdings, cherry stem roads, historical mining, closed roads (4.2 miles) and timber harvest are evident in places. Grazing occurs in the area and range improvements include fencing and water developments.

The area is characterized by rolling hills of pinyon juniper to steep mountainous terrain of Engelmann spruce and fir. Much of the area is within the South-Central Highlands Eco Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet.

This area has long term, intact and functioning ecological processes and provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). Lynx presence is documented. The area also provides potential habitat for Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, and goshawk. It is an important big game area and provides summer and winter range and winter concentration areas for both elk and mule deer. The area also provides bighorn sheep range and concentration areas as well as summer and winter range for pronghorn antelope. Black bear and mountain lion occur throughout the area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to a high concentration of motorized trails (36.5 miles), cherry stem roads, private inholdings, and mining and grazing activity, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are limited in this area.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be present in the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing to preserve wilderness characteristics may be difficult in this area. The established motorized use, private inholdings, existing and proposed vegetation treatments, and roading in the area all pose challenges to managing the area for wilderness values. In addition, this is a high potential area for oil and gas exploration and mineral potential. Future exploration could change the areas wilderness character. Additionally, there is some WUI on the eastern boundary of the area. Fire is undesired in WUI areas and a full range of suppression actions and equipment would likely be used to suppress fire in the area, further making management of this area as wilderness difficult.

## SAGUACHE RANGER DISTRICT

### **Polygon 21**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 360 acre area is located on the Saguache Ranger District on the Rio Grande National Forest, adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness. La Garita Wilderness is administered by the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG).

NFSR 776.1A, B, C, D (Table MTN) defines the areas north-south boundary and provides access to the area.

NFSR 745 (Horse Canyon) runs between the evaluation area and the La Garita Wilderness for a short section before it is closed due to continuation through the wilderness on the GMUG.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area appears relatively natural and shares many of the same natural qualities as the adjacent wilderness.

The presence of a closed road (NFSR 745) and a portion of open road (also NFSR 745) between the evaluation area and the La Garita wilderness represents a departure from naturalness in that area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are possible in some parts of the area. Due to adjacency with La Garita Wilderness, a feeling of solitude and remoteness can be experienced

when away from sights and sounds from adjacent roads. However, high visitor use during hunting season may impact opportunities for solitude at specific times.

Motorized sounds from the open portion of NFSR 745 could also detract from a feeling of remoteness and distance from civilization.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be within the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics in this area is possible due to its adjacency with La Garita wilderness. Where the evaluation area is contiguous to the wilderness, management practices could be extended to the area.

However, some challenges still exist. The presence of a closed road (NFSR 745) and a portion of open road (also NFSR 745) between the evaluation area and the La Garita wilderness separates the small evaluation area from La Garita Wilderness. In addition, sounds from motorized use on the open portion of the road could be heard within the area. Finally, much of the small area is surrounded by open roads. These adjacent roads could pose challenges related to vehicle incursions, motorized trespass, or pervasive sights and sounds of civilization that could impact the wilderness character of the area.

## DIVIDE RANGER DISTRICT

### **Polygon 22**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 10,450 acre area is located on the Divide Ranger District of the Rio Grande National Forest. It is bordered on all sides by sections of private land interspersed with Forest Service land. Perimeter road access is via NFSR 646 (Old Woman Creek) in the west, 660 (Natural Arch) in the south, 670 (La Garita) in the north. Two NFSRs 670.2b (Canada Ancha) and 659 (La Ventana) create “cherry stems” into the area and 659 terminates at Natural Arch Trailhead.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Roads (1.6 miles of closed roads), private in-holdings, mining activity and water developments detract from the apparent naturalness of the area. However, away from these activities and improvements, the area is generally natural appearing.

Elephant Rocks Research Natural Area is located within the evaluation area and is characterized by predominately natural-appearing landscapes.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are possible in much of the area, with some exceptions. Cherry stemmed roads can impact opportunities for both solitude (presence of motorized sounds) and primitive and unconfined recreation (linear constructed features that impede free and unobstructed travel). Further, recreation use in the popular Natural Arch area may impact opportunities for solitude during high-use times. Finally, adjacent private land uses could detract from opportunities if motorized sounds or other land management practices are pervasive from outside the area.

#### *Unique Features*

Several unique features are noted for the area including: Natural Arch, Elephant Rocks Research Natural area, geologic features, and wildlife habitat.

#### *Manageability*

Adjacent private land ownership, cherry stem roads, mining activity and water developments make managing this area for wilderness characteristics difficult.

### **Polygon 23**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,110 acre area is located on the Divide Ranger district of the Rio Grande National Forest. It is bordered in the north, east and western boundaries by Forest Service land managed for Deer and Elk winter range in the west and the Elephant Rocks RNA to the north and east. BLM and private lands border the area in the south and southeast.

Access to the area is via NFSR 665 (East Butte) and 661 (Indian Head) from the south and NFSR 660 (Natural Arch) in the north.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

There is a low degree of apparent naturalness in the area due to mining and grazing activity, water developments, private inholdings and old roads (1.6 miles of closed roads).

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation would be low due to the presence of roads, a nearby airport, and activities associated with adjacent land management.

#### *Unique Features*

Two unique features are noted for this area: wildlife habitat and cultural values.

#### *Manageability*

Due to adjacent roads and private land, managing for wilderness characteristics may be difficult for this area.

## Polygon 24

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 120 acre area is located on the Rio Grande National Forest, Divide Ranger District, bordered in the north by the Wheeler Geologic Area and the east, west, and south by the La Garita Wilderness.

Main access is via NFSR 600 (Pool Table) and NFSR 790 (Wheeler)

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area reflects the apparent naturalness of the adjacent La Garita wilderness.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities are similar to those found in the surrounding wilderness area.

### *Unique Features*

One unique feature was noted for this area: access The Wheeler Geological Area, a special interest Management area, makes up the northern boundary of the area.

### *Manageability*

Management for preservation of wilderness character would be possible in the area as it is almost entirely surrounded by the La Garita Wilderness. Management practices for the La Garita Wilderness could be extended to this area.

## Polygon 25.a

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **High-UT** wilderness character in the upper tier CRA and **Moderate** and **Moderate/High**, elsewhere.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 28,780 acre area is located approximately three miles north and east of the town of Creede in Mineral County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District, Rio Grande National Forest. The area is adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness on the north and eastern boundaries. Lands to the west and south are private lands and RGNF managed under the General Forest and Rangelands-Forest Vegetation Emphasis management description. The 20,500 acre upper tier Wason Park CRA is within the area and is characterized by gentle to steep alpine slopes and ridges, talus slopes, and glacial basins at higher elevation. Mid-elevation is composed of benches (park openings) and steep cliff walls into East and West Bellows Creeks. The Lower East Bellows CRA (1,700 acres) is also within the evaluation area and is characterized by gentle to steep forested mountainous slopes and ridges with high-quality cliff habitat.

Primary access is via NFSR 502 (East Willow Creek), 673 (West Willow), 501 (Dry Gulch) in the central and northern regions and 600 (Pool Table) provides access in the south.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area in the upper tier Wason Park CRA generally appears natural with the exception of evidence of heavy historic mining, active mining claims, and timber harvest in some areas. Areas outside the upper tier CRA appear less natural due to current and past land management practices including grazing, mining and vegetation treatments.

The area has long term intact functioning ecological processes and represents an important landscape due to its adjacency to the wilderness on two sides creating a large expanse of relatively unfragmented and undisturbed habitats for a variety of wildlife species. It is most unique for bighorn sheep and big game species. It is in close proximity to a high use lynx area and likely provides potential habitat and denning habitat for the federally listed species.

The area also provides habitat and /or potential habitat for the Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, wolverine, and American three-toed woodpeckers. The upper tier CRA also provides elk and mule deer summer, production, and winter concentration habitat. The mammoth Mountain and Farmer's Creek area are winter concentration areas for elk and deer, bighorn sheep summer and winter habitat, habitat for moose, and pine marten. The Wason Park CRA is also adjacent to priority habitat for moose in West Willow Creek. These areas provide a migration route for bighorn sheep from the Bellow Creek herd to the San Luis Peak and Bristol Head herds. The Lower East Bellows CRA, also adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness and provides sheep summer and winter concentration and production habitat as well as elk and mule deer winter concentration range and moose habitat.

Improvements and developments from historic and active mining claims detract from naturalness in some areas. In addition, there are 5.5 miles of level one (closed) roads and approximately 22 miles of non-motorized trail that may detract from apparent naturalness in those areas.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found to a high degree in areas closer to La Garita Wilderness or away from trails, roads, and other evidence of current or past mining activities.

The town of Creede can be seen from the west side of the area, providing evidence of nearby civilization. Summer, fall and winter outfitter and guide activities are permitted in the area.

East Willow Road (502.1A) creates a "cherry stem" which can increase motorized sounds in the area.

#### *Unique Features*

Several unique features are noted for this area including: waterfalls, scenic values, and historic features.

Approximately 100 acres of the area is within the Bachelor Loop Special interest Area which is designated due to its historical significance.

Scenic values, especially in the southwest portion of the area are noted for their uniqueness.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics is possible in much of the area, especially in the upper tier CRA and areas directly adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness. However, some uses and specific areas would pose management challenges.

The southern boundary is near a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Wildfire is typically not desired in a WUI and a full range of suppression actions would likely be taken should a fire be threatening the area.

Due to patented mining claims and active mineral prospecting there is a potential for future access and development on these sites which may change the areas character.

Private land in-holdings near East Willow road could pose challenges related to access and motorized uses.

### **Polygon 25.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate/High** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 1,510 acre area is located on the Rio Grande National Forest, Divide Ranger district. It is bordered on the west by the La Garita Wilderness.

Primary access to the area is via NFSR 600 (Pool Table), which also defines the areas northern, eastern and southern boundary.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area appears natural and has similar characteristics as that of the adjacent wilderness.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to its adjacency with the La Garita Wilderness, lack of trails or other developments, and minimal management activities in the area, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found throughout the area. However, some motorized sounds may be noticeable when near the adjacent road and old vegetation treatments, visible from within the area, may detract from a feeling of seclusion and remoteness.

#### *Unique Features*

Deep canyons were noted as a unique feature in the area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character in this area is possible. Adjacency with the La Garita Wilderness and minimal established uses or improvements make it possible to manage the area for its wilderness characteristics.

## Polygon 26

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **High-UT** wilderness character in the Bristol Head upper tier CRA and **Moderate/High** within the remainder of the Bristol Head CRA and **Low** elsewhere.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 70,220 acre area is located several miles west of Creede, in Mineral and Hinsdale Counties. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. The northern border is the Continental Divide, adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness in the GMUG National Forest.

The 46,100 acre Bristol Head upper tier CRA is within the area.

Access is via US Highway 149 along the upper western boundary: NFSR 532 (Bristol Head) near the mid-western boundary, NFSR 509 (Santa Maria) and NFSR 508 (Shallow Creek) at the southeast boundary, NFSR 507 (Miner Creek) at the eastern boundary, and NFSR 505 (Rat Creek) at the northeast boundary.

Landforms include mountains and a few valley plains. The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are this sections major landform feature. This area is characterized by gentle alpine slopes from Bristol Head and Table Mountain to Snow Mesa, steep cliffs below and south of Bristol Head, gentle to moderate mountain slopes with flood plain, toe slopes and fans in canyons and valley bottoms.

### *Apparent naturalness*

In the upper tier Bristol Head CRA, the area is relatively natural in appearance although there is evidence of historical mining, timber harvest and motorized trails. The area provides potential habitat and denning habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx and also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, and wolverine. Northern goshawk is documented in this CRA. This CRA provides elk and mule deer summer range and production areas. The south and east portions of this CRA are winter concentration areas. The area provides moose habitat and is adjacent to priority habitat for moose in North and South Clear Creeks. The Seepage Creek drainage and cliffs east of the Santa Maria Reservoir are a summer concentration area for bighorn sheep. An active bald eagle nesting site is adjacent to the boundary.

Areas outside the CRA have a lesser degree of naturalness as signs of current and past management are more evident. Grazing occurs in the area and range improvements include fencing and water development. Motorized access is allowed for range improvements. There are private land in-holdings and a communication site adjacent to the area that impacts apparent naturalness.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

One can get a sense of remoteness and seclusion within the area with some exceptions. There is approximately 18 miles of motorized trails including the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and Colorado Trail and 22 miles of non-motorized trails. Sounds associated with motorized use diminish a feeling of remoteness from civilization and impact opportunities for solitude. Presence of cherry stem and adjacent roads, as well as high snowmobile use in the winter impact opportunities for solitude.



### *Unique Features*

Several unique features were noted for this area including: presence of a Bighorn sheep population, important cultural sites, and presence of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

### *Manageability*

In the upper tier CRA, especially adjacent to the La Garita Wilderness, managing for wilderness characteristics is possible. However, established snowmobile use in the area as well as summer motorized trail use could pose management challenges related to motorized trespass and vehicle incursions.

The area's eastern area has some potential for mineral activity and some prospective drilling has occurred in the McKenzie Mountain area. There is no potential for oil and gas leasing. There are no leases or nominations. Lease stipulations are administratively unavailable within the CRA.

## **Polygon 27**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 29,740 acre area is located 13 miles south of Lake City in Hindsdale County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District on the Rio Grande National Forest. The RGNF lands to the east and west are managed for recreation and general forest activities. Its southeastern boundary is private land (Pearl Lakes Trout Club). Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG) lands border the area to the north. Access is by NFSR 516 (Mason Creek road) and 518 (Heart Lake road) which border the southern boundary of this area.

The 9,900 acre Big Buck-Kitty-Ruby CRA is within this area. Much of the area is within the South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. This area is characterized by gentle to steep alpine slopes, ridges in the northern portion, and gentle to moderate slopes with floodplains, toe slopes, and fan in canyons and valley bottoms. Major drainages include Buck Creek, Kitty Creek, and Ruby Creek.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Old mining activity, evidence of vegetation treatments, motorized trails, and year round structures all detract from apparent naturalness in the area. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing.

However, portions of the area, especially within the CRA, have long term, intact and functioning ecological processes providing potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and the southwestern willow flycatcher (endangered). The area also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: goshawk, American marten (documented occurrence), wolverine, American three-toed woodpecker, and ptarmigan. Additionally, the area is big game summer range, elk production and habitat for moose.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are limited within the area. Motorized trails within the area as well as heavy motorized use adjacent to the area may impact opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

Additionally, motorized access is permitted for range management.

### *Unique Features*

The Continental Divide National Scenic trail is a noted unique feature in the area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character would be difficult due to established motorized use, current and future mining activity and year-round structures in this area. The Colorado State Land Board has approximately 10 acres of mineral interest that underlies Forest Service surface ownership within the Big Buck/Kitty/Ruby Colorado Roadless Area.

## **Polygon 28**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: The upper tier Pole Mountain-Finger Mesa CRA and the Finger Mesa Research Natural Area make up the western half (31,860 acres) of this area and has **High-UT** wilderness character. Wilderness character declines to **Moderate/High** (18,810 acres) in the east due to the influence of roads and further declines along the eastern boundary due to roading and timber sales.

### *Description/location*

The approximately 64,050 acre area is in the western part of the Rio Grande National Forest, in San Juan and Hinsdale Counties. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. The area lies along the boundary of the Rio Grande together with the San Juan NF to the Northwest, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the North and the Gunnison (GMUG) NF to the Northeast. It is located in the headwaters area of upper Rio Grande and borders the Continental Divide. Access is by NFSR 520 (Rio Grande road) which borders the area's southern boundary, NFSR 533 (Sawmill Canyon finger Mesa) on the southeast boundary, NFSR 516 (Mason Creek) on the eastern boundary, and NFSR 518 (Heart Lake) on its northeast boundary.

The upper tier Pole Mountain-finger Mesa (43,900 acres) and the Finger Mesa Research Natural Area lie within this evaluation area.

This area is characterized by alpine slopes, to very steep alpine ridges, talus slopes, and glacial basins, gentle to steep mountain slopes to floodplain, toe slopes and fans in canyon and valley bottom.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. It is fairly natural with the exception of evidence of historic mining, dredging and timber harvest. Outside the upper tier CRA and RNA, apparent naturalness declines as roading, private land and inholdings, proximity to developed recreation sites and evidence of current and past management practices increases.

The CRA provides habitat and has documented colonies of the federally listed (endangered) Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly at high elevations. The area receives high-use by Canada lynx and is a key area to lynx movement between the Rio Grande and San Juan National Forests. The CRA also provides potential denning habitat for this federally listed species. A lynx den site has been documented near this CRA. Additionally, the CRA provides potential habitat for the southwest willow flycatcher (endangered). The CRA provides habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep (documented use), American marten (documented), and wolverine. Possible wolverine tracks have been noted nearby along Continental Divide. This CRA provides elk and mule deer summer concentration habitat, elk production habitat, and bighorn sheep summer, winter and production habitat. Lost Trail Creek provides priority habitat for moose. Other species known to be present include: black bear, beaver, and ptarmigan. Peregrine falcons forage in the area and there is high quality potential nest habitat available.

Portions of several grazing allotments occur in the CRA. Range improvements include fencing and motorized access is allowed for range improvements. There are private lands, and in-holdings. There is a patented claim along with some prospecting in the Canby Mountain area. These uses and improvements represent a departure from apparent naturalness.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

There are approximately 28 miles of motorized trails and 16 miles of non-motorized trails (CDNST and CT) in the area. However, due to the area's size and rough terrain, one can get a sense of remoteness and seclusion, especially in the CRA and RNA away from motorized trails, developments and roads.

#### *Unique Features*

Several unique features are noted for the area including: The Finger Mesa Research Natural Area, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, unique geologic features, important wildlife habitat and cultural values.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics is possible but some challenges exist throughout the area. Mining claims along the northern boundary, motorized trails, cherry stem roads, private land and private land inholdings all make managing for wilderness character difficult. However, in the upper tier CRA and RNA as well as areas adjacent to wilderness or proposed wilderness, fewer difficulties protecting wilderness values exist.

### **Polygon 29**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

The approximately 6,370 acre area is in the western part of the Rio Grande National Forest, adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness in San Juan County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. The area lies along the boundary of two forests, the Rio Grande National Forest lands on the north and the San Juan National Forest lands to the south, is located in the headwaters area of upper Rio Grande, and borders the Continental Divide.

The upper tier Beartown CRA (2,400 acres) and upper tier Indian Ridge CRA (1,600 acres) are within this evaluation area. NFSR 506 (Bear Creek) bisects the area and separates Beartown CRA from the Indian Ridge CRA just to the east. NFSR 520 (Rio Grande Reservoir) separates the area from the Pole Mountain/Finger Mesa upper tier CRA to the north.

The Indian Ridge CRA area is characterized by remarkably wild country with west facing, steep alpine and mountainous slopes and valley bottoms. The Beartown CRA is characterized by east facing slopes, moderate to steep alpine and mountain slopes, ridges in the southern portion and toe slopes which fan into the valley bottoms.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area's long-term ecological processes are intact and functioning. It is relatively natural in appearance, however, some historical mining and timber harvest are evident in the area. Kobresia and forbs are on the alpine ridges. The mountain slopes have subalpine fir/Engelmann spruce with Rocky Mountain whortleberry. Willow and sedges occur in the valley bottoms.

This area provides potential quality, relatively unfragmented habitat and excellent denning potential for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). The area also provides potential habitat for wolverine and American marten, a Forest Service sensitive species. Possible wolverine tracks have been noted nearby along the Continental Divide. Beaver, black bear, moose, ptarmigan have been documented. This area also provides summer range for elk and mule deer.

There are no closed roads or motorized trails in the area, though there are private inholdings, a snotel site, and range improvements (fencing) that detract from overall naturalness.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found in much of the area, especially away from roads and other authorized motorized uses. There is approximately 3 miles of non-motorized trail that provides access for primitive recreation within the area. Because of the steep terrain, limited access, and adjacency to designated wilderness, one can get a sense of seclusion and remoteness when in the area.

#### *Unique Features*

There are no unique features noted for this area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics is possible in the area, though challenges exist related to motorized uses, presence and maintenance of a snotel site, private inholdings, and NFSR 506 (Bear Town) that bisects the northern portion from the southern portion of the area. However, much of the area is adjacent to designated wilderness making the extension of wilderness management into the evaluation area possible.

### **Polygon 30.a, 30.b, 30.c**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: These areas have a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

Three small parcels (approximately 20 acres, 5 acres, and 20 acres respectively), are located on the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Divide Ranger district adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness to the south. NFSR 520 (Rio Grande Reservoir) runs along the parcels northern boundary and provides access to the areas.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness is low in these small areas (additional information about effects related to the adjacent road and/or plant community composition, including invasive species presence, needed for these areas).

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

There are no level one roads or trails in these areas, however, proximity to NFSR 520, topography, lack of screening, and the small size of these areas may impact opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are noted for these areas.

#### *Manageability*

These small parcels are sandwiched between NFSR 520 and the Weminuche Wilderness. Close proximity to NFSR 520 and issues related to roading may make it difficult to manage these areas wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygons 31,32,33,34**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: These areas have a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

These four areas are located on the Rio Grande National Forest, Divide Ranger district. Approximate area acreages for each polygon are as follows: area 31 (140 acres), area 32 (120 acres), area 33 (960 acres), and area 34 (260). All four areas are adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness. NFSR 520 (Rio Grande Reservoir) runs along the parcels northern boundary and provides primary access to the area. Areas 31 and 32 are separated by a section of private land. Area 32 has a section of private land nearly bisecting its area, and area 33 has a section of private land separating it from area 34.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

While some aspects of these areas plant communities and overall ecological functioning are similar to that found in the adjacent wilderness, their small size, proximity to the Rio Grande Reservoir road, and fragmentation due to adjacent private lands, results in a low degree of apparent naturalness.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Few opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation exist in these areas. Close proximity to NFSR 520 (Rio Grande Reservoir road), small size, and adjacency to several trailheads, campgrounds and boat launches, may impact a visitor's ability to experience solitude (sights and sounds) or primitive and unconfined recreation.

### *Unique Features*

No unique features are noted for these areas.

### *Manageability*

These small parcels are adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness but are too small to manage it for their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Adjacent private land, nearby recreation developments, and the Rio Grande Reservoir road all make managing for wilderness characteristics challenging in these areas.

## **Polygon 35**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 1,810 acre area is located approximately 15 miles west and south of Creede, in Hindsdale County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness on the south boundary and private land along the Rio Grande corridor. National Forest lands along the north and western boundary are managed for recreation and general forest activities. Access is by NFSR 520 (Rio Grande Reservoir road), which borders a portion of the northern boundary. NFSR 520.2I (Rio Grande SHG) accesses the easternmost portion of the area.

The 1,200 acre Box-road Canyon upper tier CRA is within the area. This CRA is characterized by moderate to very steep canyon slopes with rocky, broken, highly dissected terrain on the northern exposures.

### *Apparent naturalness*

This area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes, however, historical mining and timber harvest are evident. Apparent naturalness is highest in the upper tier CRA and diminishes in areas closer to roads, historic mining and timber relics. There is a borrow pit and a manmade reservoir that detracts from overall naturalness in the area. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements including fencing and water development are in the area.

The CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). It is within or adjacent to a high use area for lynx. The CRA provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, goshawk (documented occurrence), and American marten. Bald eagles have been observed using the CRA in winter. This CRA provides elk and mule deer summer and winter range; bighorn sheep summer, winter and production habitat and habitat for moose. The area also provides Bighorn sheep habitat.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are low throughout the area. Uses on the Rio Grande Reservoir road as well as at the reservoir are visible from within the area. Motorized sounds from the road and range management activities, as well as several developed recreation sites adjacent to area, may further detract from a feeling of remoteness and seclusion.

### *Unique Features*

Bighorn sheep habitat is a noted unique feature in the area.

### *Manageability*

The type and quantify of existing uses in and adjacent to the area, including the manmade reservoir and adjacent roads and recreation developments, may make managing for wilderness characteristics difficult in this area.

### **Polygon 36.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character in the vicinity of the dam and **Moderate** elsewhere.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 6,010 acre area is located in Mineral County, Colorado and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is located adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness along its western boundary. It is a horseshoe shaped area, with the eastern portion adjacent to private lands along the Rio Grande corridor. The majority of the area is within the Ruby Lake upper tier CRA.

Access is via NFSR 522 (Fern Creek) which borders the area's eastern boundary. There is one NFST that accesses the Ruby Lake and the Wilderness. The trail up to the lake (Fern Creek) is open to motorized use. The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. This area is characterized by steep glacial cirques, alpine ridges, talus slopes and glacial basins at higher elevations, and gentle to steep mountain slopes at mid-elevations.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness in this area is generally low due to historical mining, roads, a dam, a cabin, and timber harvest.

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. This area provides a diversity of high quality habitat near the Continental Divide. Potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and Mexican spotted owl (threatened) occurs here. This is a high use area for lynx, presence has been documented and denning probably occurs. The CRA also provides habitat and/or potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: American marten, wolverine, boreal toad and goshawk (nest sites documented). This CRA contains the highest known population of boreal toads on the Forest. Texas Creek is a high priority moose habitat area and summer concentration/production area for elk. The area provides elk and mule deer summer and elk winter

range, and moose habitat. Bald eagles concentrate in the area during the winter and forage along the river.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness and provides motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. There are approximately four miles of motorized trails and five miles of non-motorized trails within the area. Summer and fall outfitter and guide activities are permitted. With the limited access and low density of system trails, one can obtain a sense of seclusion and solitude within this area when away from motorized trails and other developments.

#### *Unique Features*

There are no unique features known to be within the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing this area for wilderness characteristics may be difficult, especially near the dam or near motorized trails. Water rights and the presence of a dam may pose ongoing challenges related to access, maintenance, and motorized uses.

### **Polygon 36.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 3 acre area is located in Mineral County, Colorado and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness along its western and southern boundaries and adjacent to private land along its northern and eastern boundaries.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness is low throughout the area (input on plant communities, including weeds, and affects from roading and adjacent land management practices needed).

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to its very small size and adjacency to private land, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are low.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are noted for this area.

#### *Manageability*

Effects of adjacent land uses (roading and private land) may make this area too small to manage it for its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.



### **Polygon 37.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate/High** wilderness character (south of permitted road).

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 3,680 acre area is located in Mineral County, Colorado and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is located adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness area on its western and southwestern borders. The remaining adjacent lands are Rio Grande National Forest lands prescribed to be managed for recreation and general forest activities. A section of private land is adjacent to the area in the southwest. Access to this area is by NFSRs 524 (Copper Creek road), 523 (Middle Creek road), and 525 (Gold Bar road).

The Sulphur Tunnel CRA is within the area. There is a special use road accessing the private in-holding at Sulfur Tunnel. The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area is characterized by gentle to steep mountainous slopes with Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands and Rocky Mountain whortleberry. Trout Creek is the major drainage within the area.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. The area is relatively natural in appearance, however, historical mining and timber harvest are evident. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing.

This area provides potential habitat and denning habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). This is a high use area for lynx and lynx have been documented in this unit. The area also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: American marten (documented occurrence), wolverine (along the Continental Divide), American three-toed woodpecker and boreal toads. The area is adjacent to known boreal toad overall range and actual breeding populations and may also contain boreal toad populations. The area provides mule deer and elk winter/summer range and production areas. Copper Creek is a priority moose habitat. There are high densities of three toed woodpeckers, hermit thrush, and other spruce/fir associated species.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can generally be found within the area with a few exceptions. Private in-holdings, motorized access, and the presence of roads may detract from a feeling of remoteness from civilization and may impact a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature.

#### *Unique Features*

There are no unique features notes for the area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing to preserve wilderness character would be difficult in some areas, but possible when away from permitted road use or other authorized motorized uses and improvements. The Colorado State Land Board has approximately 70 acres of mineral interest that underlies Forest Service surface

ownership within the Sulphur Tunnel CRA. There is no potential for oil and gas leasing. There are no leases or nominations. The area's lease stipulations are no surface occupancy.

### **Polygon 37.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate/High** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 7,850 acre area is located in Mineral County, Colorado and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness area. The western border is Rio Grande National Forest lands prescribed to be managed for recreation and general forest activities. A portion of the eastern boundary abuts private land. Access is by NFSR 523 (Middle Creek) and NFSR 524 (Copper Creek) which borders the eastern boundary.

The Copper Mountain-Sulphur upper tier CRA makes up most of the area. This area is characterized by gentle to steep mountain slopes, moderate to very steep glacial cirques, alpine ridges, talus slopes, and glacial basins

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes. Historical mining and timber harvest are evident and vehicle access is permitted to the private in-holding. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing.

The area provides potential habitat and denning habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). This is a high use area for lynx. The area also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: American marten (documented occurrence), wolverine (along the Continental Divide), American three-toed woodpecker and boreal toads. Known boreal toad populations have been documented adjacent to the area and itself may also contain boreal toad populations. The area provides mule deer and elk winter/summer range and production areas, and habitat for moose. There are high densities of American three-toed woodpeckers, hermit thrush, and other spruce/fir associated species. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing.

The main plant association in the conifer type is subalpine fir/Engelmann Spruce/Rocky Mountain whortleberry kobresia/forbs associated with the alpine slopes and ridges. Drainage bottom and openings have willow and sedges.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

The area has approximately 5 miles of non-motorized trails. Because of the close proximity of the access roads, one does not get a sense of remoteness (sight and sounds). Motorized access is allowed for range improvements.

#### *Unique Features*

Geologic features are a noted unique feature of the area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics would be difficult, especially in the north end of the area, where heavy road use and adjacent private land uses may make it difficult to preserve the areas wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygon 38.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character within the Snowshoe Mountain upper tier CRA (31,340 acres) and **Low/Moderate** (5,380 acres) elsewhere.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 36,720 acre area is located a few miles south of the town of Creede in Mineral County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is bordered on the south side and parts of the northeast and northwestern corners by Forest Service lands managed for recreation and general forest activities. A small section of the southernmost boundary is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness area. The remainder of adjacent land is privately owned. There are only two roads within proximity of this area; NFSR 523 (Middle Creek road) borders the eastern boundary and NFSR 528 (Lime Creek Road) borders the area's southern boundary.

The majority of the area is made up of the Snowshoe Mountain upper tier CRA (31,500 acres).

This area is characterized by moderate to steep forested mountain slopes, benches (open parks) known as Seven Parks and gentle rolling slopes with aspen. Part of the area drains into Goose Creek but the majority flows into Deep Creek.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. The area appears natural with the exception of historic mining and timber harvest evident in isolated areas. Past mining activity is associated with the 1889 Creede silver discovery. In addition, livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing and water development. There is approximately 1.2 miles of level 1 (closed) road in the area.

The main plant association in the conifer type is subalpine fir/Engelmann spruce/Rocky Mountain whortleberry and Aspen/Thurber fescue. Plants associated with mountain valleys and openings are willow/sedge and Thurber fescue/Arizona fescue.

The area provides potential habitat and denning for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). This is a high use area for lynx particularly in the south end. Lynx have been documented in the CRA. The area also provides potential habitat for American marten, a Forest Service sensitive species. The area provides summer and winter range and production areas for mule deer, elk and moose habitat.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

The area provides a quality backcountry hunting experience for elk, deer and moose. Much of the area is currently managed for motorized and non-motorized opportunities with additional management prescriptions for Deer and Elk Winter Range and Forest Production. There are approximately 13 miles of

non-motorized trails within the CRA (NFST 806 Deep Creek Trail and 851 Pierce Trail). There are no motorized trails in the area, however, motorized access is allowed for range improvements. Because of the size of the area and the terrain, one can get a sense of seclusion and solitude.

#### *Unique Features*

Unique geologic features have been identified within the area.

Additionally, the Wagon Wheel Gap Watershed Experiment Station Special Interest Area is within this area. This SIA was designated because of its historical significance as the first watershed experiment ever conducted in the United States between the years of 1909 and 1926.

#### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses is minimal and dispersed (mainly around the perimeter of the area) and makes management to preserve the area's wilderness characteristics possible in most areas. However, challenges may result from areas management actions on adjacent private land or where current motorized access and range improvements exist within the area.

### **Polygon 38.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 6,490 acre area is located in Mineral County, Colorado and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness area along its eastern boundary. Its southern boundary joins the San Juan National Forest. Its western boundary is adjacent to Rio Grande National Forest lands prescribed to be managed for recreation and general forest activities. The only road access within close proximity of this area is via NFSR 526 (Red Mountain Creek) and NFSR 527 (Ivy Creek). Much of the area is made up of the Red Mountain upper tier CRA. This area is characterized by gentle to very steep mountain slopes and ridges. Rock outcrop ridges are very steep with accumulations of talus and rock glaciers.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area has long term, intact functioning ecological processes. The area is generally natural appearing, with evidence of historical mining and timber harvest activities in some areas. A portion of the area in the north is open to livestock grazing as a part of the Fisher-Ivy/Goose sheep and goat allotment. There is approximately 2.1 miles of level one (closed) road within the area.

The main plant association is subalpine fire/Engelmann spruce/Rocky Mountain whortleberry. The area provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened), Mexican spotted owl (threatened) and willow flycatcher (endangered). Lynx presence has been documented, and potential denning habitat is available. Mule deer and elk summer and production range, moose habitat, and American marten habitat (Forest Service sensitive species) are also provided within the area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

One can experience a high quality backcountry hunting experience for elk, deer, and moose. The area provides non-motorized recreation opportunities with several miles of non-motorized trails. Because of the limited access and few NFSTs in this area, one can get a sense of remoteness and seclusion while in this area.

### *Unique Features*

Geologic features have been identified as being a unique feature in this area.

### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness characteristics would be difficult in some areas, especially those areas adjacent to roads, private land, or water and recreation developments. The highly lobed shape of the northern portion of this evaluation area could also pose management challenges as sights and sounds from motorized uses or adjacent land management activities would be more evident where narrow sections of land are surrounded by uses and activities not consistent with preserving wilderness characteristics.

## **Polygon 39**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 11,660 acre area is located in the center of the Rio Grande National Forest administered by the Divide Ranger District. Its southern and western boundary is adjacent to BLM and private lands. Roads within close proximity of this area are NFSR 610 (Alder) on its east boundary and NFSR 600 (Pool Table) on its northern boundary. The area is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness is low in this area due to evidence of mining activity and vegetation treatments. Additionally, there are approximately 2.2 miles of level 1 (closed) road in the area. There is an active cattle and horse allotment (Alder) in the area and range improvements may include fence or water developments.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation is low in this area. Close proximity to South Fork and several nearby subdivisions as well as easy access along its eastern boundary allows for high recreation use that could impact opportunities for solitude. There are approximately 11.5 miles of motorized trail that run through the middle of the area that would be inconsistent with wilderness law. Authorized motorized access to manage range improvements is allowed and may also detract from opportunities for solitude.

### *Unique Features*

Unique historic features have been identified within this area.

### *Manageability*

This area would be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to proximity to South Fork, roads, adjacent private land, mining and vegetation management areas. Management activities associated with livestock grazing, including motorized access to range improvements like fencing and water development, would make managing the area for wilderness values difficult.

### **Polygon 40**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 11,130 acre area is located in the center of the Rio Grande National Forest. This area contains the Middle Alder CRA (5,400 acres) which is approximately two miles north of the town of South Fork in Rio Grande County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. Its southern boundary is adjacent to BLM and private land. Roads within close proximity of this area are NFSR 610 (Alder) on its west boundary; NFSR 611 (Difficult/Bear) on its northern boundary, and NFSR 630 (Agua Ramon) on its east boundary. The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. This area is characterized by steep, mountainous terrain comprised of Engelmann spruce/alpine fir stands. Three major drainages (Middle Alder, West Bear, and Bear Creek) are in this CRA.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Although the area is relatively natural in appearance, there is evidence of historical mining, vegetation treatments and timber harvest. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing and water development can be found in the area. There are approximately 11 miles of motorized trails and five miles of level one roads within the area.

This CRA provides potential foraging and denning habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened), however it appears to be a low use area by lynx. The CRA also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: American marten, wolverine and goshawk (documented nearby on the forest). It is a key big game security habitat and provides mule deer and elk winter concentration areas and summer range. The west fork of Alder Creek, headwaters to Alder Creek has a wild population of pure Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

The area provides both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. Because of the area's steep, rocky terrain, one can get a sense of remoteness within the area when away from motorized uses. This CRA is in close proximity to South Fork and several nearby subdivisions. Easy access along its boundary, allows for high recreation use. This could impact opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

### *Unique Features*

Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest. No other unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area may be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to proximity to South Fork, roads, and vegetation management areas. Livestock grazing occurs and motorized access for range improvements, include fencing and water development, is authorized. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing in the area, though there are no current leases or nominations. There is a WUI on the southern boundary against the town of South Fork, which may pose additional management challenges related to wildfire suppression.

### **Polygon 41**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 45,400 acre area is located in the center of the Rio Grande National Forest. The area contains the 33,100 acre Trout Mountain – Elk Mountain CRA, located just south of the town of Wagon Wheel. It is located in Mineral County and administered by the Divide Ranger District. It is separated from the Weminuche Wilderness Area by a sliver of Forest Service lands with NFSR 430 running the length of the western boundary between the CRA and the wilderness area. The northwestern corner of the CRA is adjacent to private lands. The remainders of the boundaries are adjacent to Forest Service lands managed for recreation and general forest activities. Roads within close proximity of this area are U.S Highway 160 and NFSR 430 (Shaw lake) on its south and west boundary. The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area has high, mountainous terrain with steep cliffs along its eastern boundary. Vegetation is mature Engelmann spruce/alpine fir interspersed with Douglas-fir and aspen.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The general landscape is relatively natural appearing. Historical mining, timber harvest, and roads are evident within the CRA. Much of the area was cut for railroad ties. This CRA is probably most important for big game species. The CRA also provides habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened), and has been considered a high use area. The CRA also provides habitat and/or potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: goshawk (known nesting), American marten, wolverine and American three toed woodpeckers (high densities in the spruce-fir zones). The following species are known to use the CRA: moose, elk (migration corridor, summer/winter range), mule deer (summer/.winter range), black bear, mountain lion, peregrine falcon, bald eagle (winter concentration area). It is an overall habitat and production area for Merriam Turkey.

There are approximately 11 miles of motorized trails and 25 miles of non-motorized trails within the area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

The area provides non-motorized opportunities with a limited motorized travel trail route. Because of the area's size and non-motorized recreation opportunities, one can obtain a sense of remoteness and seclusion when in this area. Private land and roads could impact opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, but would not be widespread.



### *Unique Features*

Other than traditional and cultural sites found here there are no other unique qualities known in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area may be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to existing motorized use, private inholdings and various other permitted activities. Issues might arise due to the livestock grazing and range improvements that include fencing and water development, and also allow for motorized access. There is a small parcel of private land (Metros Lake area) within the CRA that could pose management challenges related to access and use. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing. There is WUI on southeast boundary, most of which lies within the Del Norte FPD CWPP.

## **Polygon 42**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This small area of approximately 440 acres is located in the middle of the Rio Grande National Forest on the western border. It is located to the east of the South San Juan Wilderness in Mineral County. NFSR 430.3A is located on the southern border.

### *Apparent naturalness*

This area has similar characteristic to the adjacent designated wilderness, however some evidence of human activity can be seen (gravel pit). There is approximately 2 miles of non-motorized trail in the area. The vegetation consists mostly of Engelmann Spruce on mountain slopes and Willows and Sedges on floodplains.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Overall the area has a high degree of opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. With the adjacent wilderness the feeling of solitude can be achieved and one can get away from the sounds and disturbances of human activity and roads.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area may be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristic due to its small size and adjacent road and gravel pit access. Adjusting the boundary for the existing gravel pit may mitigate some management challenges in that area.

## **Polygon 43.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate** wilderness character.



### *Description/location*

This approximately 6,410 acre is located on the western border of the Rio Grande National Forest in Mineral County. The area contains two CRAs, Kitty Creek (1,500 acres) and Gibbs Creek (1,400 acres), both managed by the Divide Ranger District. The area is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness on the western boundary.

Roads within close proximity of the area are NFSR 430 (Shaw Lake road), NFSR 431 (Kitty Creek road), NFSR 410 (Big Meadows road) and NFSR 412.1 (Spruce Creek road). Portions of the non-motorized NFST 837 (Kitty Creek trail) traverse through the area and NFST 838 (Hope Creek trail) are adjacent to the southern boundary of Kitty Creek CRA. NFST 841 (Gibbs Creek) runs the entire length of the Gibbs Creek CRA. The area is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. This is high-elevation mountainous terrain with Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands and aspen.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Although past vegetation treatments are visible, this area is still somewhat natural appearing. Historical timber harvest, mining and past early century railroad tie cutting are evident throughout the area. This area provides potential habitat and denning for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). It is a high use lynx area within or adjacent to Wolf Creek Pass Lynx Linkage area, a key to lynx movements north and south. The CRA also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten (documented occurrence), wolverine, American three-toed woodpecker, and boreal toad. It is primarily summer range for deer, elk, moose, and for bighorn sheep.

There are approximately eight miles of non-motorized trails and six miles of level one roads within the area

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Because of minimal access, this area can provide a sense of remoteness and solitude. With the adjacent designated wilderness, primitive and unconfined recreation is obtainable nearby and within the area. Nearby roads may impact solitude, but would lessen as distance from roads increases.

### *Unique Features*

Approximately 170 acres of the Gibbs Creek CRA are in forest plan management area, Designated and Eligible Scenic Rivers. Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest. No other unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area would be difficult to manage for wilderness character due to its small size and current uses. There are water rights issues and ditches which may pose challenges. Livestock grazing has occurred in the past, however the allotments are vacant. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing, but there are currently no leases or nominations.

### **Polygon 43.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate** degree of wilderness character, however some boundary adjustments would need to be made to obtain that ranking.

#### *Description/location*

This small area (approximately 650 acres) is located in the center of the Rio Grande National Forest just north of the Kitty Creek CRA. The area is adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness. NFSR 430.3A runs to the east and several other roads to the south.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Although past vegetation treatments are visible, the area still appears relatively natural. There are about two miles of non-motorized trails and only .1 mile of a level one road. The vegetation type is mostly characterized by Engelmann Spruce on mountain slopes.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Overall, the area provides a high degree of opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. The small size and proximity to roads may impact a traveler's opportunity to experience unconfined recreation. The proximity to wilderness helps provide a feeling of solitude and can provide for a more primitive experience.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

Management of this area to preserve its wilderness characteristics is possible due to its adjacency to the South San Juan Wilderness and minimal other uses or improvements in the area.

### **Polygon 44**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low/Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 11,900 acre polygon is located just south of US Highway 160 in the Rio Grande National Forest. The area is managed by the Divide Ranger District and sits in Rio Grande County. 7,100 acres of this area consists of the Beaver Mountain CRA which is located approximately three miles southeast of the town of South Fork. The northwestern boundary is the South Fork of the Rio Grande and US Highway 160 intermixed with private lands. General access roads into the area include NFSR 360 (Beaver Creek) and NFSR 350 (Willow Creek). The area contains portions of two NFS motorized trails. It had an extensive road system associated with the old railroad tie cutting activity. The old road systems are now used as trails. The area is adjacent to the town of South Fork and several nearby subdivisions. This area is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet.

### *Apparent naturalness*

While there is evidence of past vegetation treatments and mining, the area is relatively natural in appearance. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing and water developments can be found within the area. There are 1.3 miles of non-motorized trails and almost eight miles of motorized trails in the area. In addition there is approximately 1 mile of a level one road in the area.

The eco-section is characterized by steeply sloping to precipitous mountains dissected by many narrow stream valleys with steep gradients. Upper mountain slopes and crests may be covered by snowfields and glaciers. High plateaus and steep walled canyons are common. The area is characterized as high elevation, mountainous terrain with Engelmann spruce/fir stands. Numerous secondary streams are within this CRA.

This area provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and Mexican spotted owl. The CRA also provides potential habitat for Forest Service sensitive species American marten and wolverine. Nesting goshawks have been documented near the northeast boundary. A portion of CRA was burned in the 2002 Million Fire

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area provides limited opportunities for solitude due to the surrounding roads, noise and human presence. There is approximately eight miles of motorized trails throughout this area, which may impact a traveler's opportunity to experience unconfined recreation and/or impact a feeling of solitude and remoteness when motorized sounds can be heard.

### *Unique Features*

Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest. No other unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

Managing this area for wilderness character may be difficult due to the amount of use and existing roads and trails. Outfitters and guides have special use permits for summer backcountry activities in the area. Motorized access is allowed for range improvements. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing, but there are no leases at this time, however there are nominations. Some WUI occurs on north boundary of the CRA and falls within the Del Norte FPD CWPP.

## **Polygon 45.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** degree for wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 7,770 acre area is located on the south west boarder of the Rio Grande National Forest and contains the Tewksberry CRA (6,600 acres) which is located approximately six miles southeast of the town of South Fork, in Rio Grande County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. The northwestern boundary is the South Fork of the Rio Grande and U.S. Hwy 160 intermixed with private lands. The remaining boundaries are adjacent to the Rio Grande National Forest lands

prescribed to be managed for dispersed recreation and general forest activities. General roads within close proximity of this area are NFSR 360 (Beaver Creek), near its north boundary, NFSR 380 (Park Creek) and NFSR 361 on the south boundary, and U S Highway 160 on the west boundary.

This area is characterized by steeply sloping to precipitous mountains dissected by many narrow stream valleys with steep gradients. Upper mountain slopes and crests may be covered by snowfields and glaciers. High plateaus and steep walled canyons are common. The area has steep mountainous terrain with mixed Douglas fir/Engelmann spruce/fir stands interspersed with aspen.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area's landscape is relatively natural in appearance, however there is some evidence of past vegetation treatments. Historical mining and timber harvest are also evident within the CRA. This CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened).

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area provides limited opportunities for solitude due to the surrounding roads, noise and human presence. Within the CRA, summer and fall outfitter and guide activities are permitted. Livestock grazing occurs and motorized access is allowed for range improvements. There are private land in-holdings. Water facilities (e.g., dams, ditches, pipelines, etc.) that occur on approximately 20 acres of the CRA. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing. There is some WUI on northwest boundary, which lies within the Del Norte FPD CWPP.

#### *Unique Features*

Approximately 100 acres of the CRA are in forest plan management area, designated and eligible Recreation Rivers. Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest. The area outside the CRA has no significant features or unique qualities.

#### *Manageability*

It may be difficult to manage this area to preserve wilderness characteristics due to its surrounding areas and current uses (additional details on management challenges needed).

### **Polygon 45.b**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 13,760 acres area is located in southwest part of the Rio Grande National Forest and administered by the Divide Ranger District is Mineral County. The southeastern boundary represents a division between the adjacent San Juan National Forest. Its southern border is defined by FS Road 330.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The apparent naturalness in this area is moderate due to the surrounding roads and trails. The area is characterized by Engelmann Spruce plant communities on mountain slopes and Alpine Sedges and Forbes on Alpine Summits.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area provides limited opportunities for solitude due to the surrounding roads, noise and human presence. There is approximately 9.8 miles of level one roads and 4.2 miles of motorized trails throughout this area, impacting a traveler's opportunity to experience unconfined recreation as well as impacting a feeling of solitude and remoteness when motorized sounds can be heard.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

It would be difficult to manage this area to preserve wilderness characteristics due to its proximity to roads and human activity. Proximity to motorized trails and roads could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

## **Polygon 46**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low to Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 9,530 acre area is located on the southwest portion of the Rio Grande National Forest and contain the Fox Mountain CRA (6,100 acres). This CRA is approximately five miles southwest of the town of South Fork, in Mineral County. It is administered by the Divide Ranger District. Roads within close proximity of this area are NFSR 390 (Pass Creek) and NFSR 381 (Fox Mountain) as well as the nearby Highway 160 to the northeast. This is a high-elevation mountainous area with steep side canyons comprised of Engelmann spruce/alpine fir stands. Several minor drainages are within the area.

### *Apparent naturalness*

This area is natural in appearance. It has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes and is relatively natural in appearance with some evidence of historical mining and timber harvest and vegetation treatment activity. This CRA is dominated by a high quality, late succession spruce-fir vegetative community. This CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and Mexican spotted owl (threatened). Approximately 0.2 miles of permitted water facilities occur.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

There is approximately one mile of motorized trails and no non-motorized trails. Because of the limited access and lack of NFSTs, one can get a sense of remoteness and solitude in this area. This area provides non-motorized recreation opportunities in the summer with snowmobile activity occurring throughout the winter.

### *Unique Features*

Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest. No other unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to the area would make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. Current grazing management activities allow for motorized access and mechanized equipment to maintain grazing developments such as fences and water developments within the area. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing which could pose management challenges in the future.

Additionally, motorized use in the area could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

### **Polygon 49**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 7,590 acre area is located in the south central portion of the Rio Grande National Forest and administered by Divide Ranger District in Rio Grande County. It's located just south of Highway 160. FS Road 350 runs along the western border and Road 345 runs along the eastern border.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness in this area is moderate due to the existing roads and trails. This area is mainly characterized by Alpine Sedges and Forbs on Alpine summits. There are approximately 3.6 miles of motorized trails and 5.4 miles of level one roads.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

While the area can provide some opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, it would be difficult to get out of the range of noises and other impacts from adjacent roads and nearby recreation. There are approximately three miles of motorized trail that can impact opportunities for solitude due to noise.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to the area may make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. With the close proximity to roads and motorized trails this could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

### **Polygon 50**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 15,730 acre area is located in the southeast side of the Rio Grande National Forest in Rio Grande County. The area is managed by the Divide Ranger District and is within Rio Grande County. It lies just south of highway 160 that runs east to the town of Del Norte. The southern border is defined by FS road 14. Along the western border is road 345 which has a few ATV and motorcycle trails that break off it and shoot out into the area.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The apparent naturalness in this area is moderate due to miles of roads and trail in and around the area. The area is characterized and dominated by Engelmann Spruce on mountain slopes. The area has about four miles level one roads and 13.9 miles motorized trails. Steep terrain in the southern portion may have limited previous management activities, which in turn has protected some of the naturalness in the area.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

While the area can provide some opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, it would be difficult to get out of the range of noises and other impacts from adjacent roads, nearby recreation, and human presence. There are approximately 14 miles of motorized trails that receive heavy day use, further impacting opportunities for solitude.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to the area may make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. The close proximity to roads and motorized trails could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

## DIVIDE AND CONEJOS PEAK RANGER DISTRICTS

### **Polygon 51**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate/High** wilderness character (51,200 acres) within the CRA boundaries, and Moderate (23,223 acres) to Low (3,400 acres) for the areas outside of the CRAs.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 77,810 acre area is located just southwest of Del Norte Colorado and managed by the Divide and Conejos Peak Ranger Districts. The area also contains the Bennet Mountain/Blowout/Willow Creek/Lion Point/Greenie Mountain CRA (52,000 acres). This CRA is located south of Del Norte, in Rio Grande County. Its southern boundary is the Alamosa River corridor and NFSR 250, which includes Forest Service and private land. The eastern boundary is the Forest boundary with adjacent lands primarily BLM mixed with some private. Its western boundary is Rio Grande National

Forest lands. Its northern boundary is private lands along Pinos Creek, intermixed with Forest Service lands. There are numerous motorized and non-motorized trails that provide access to the area.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

In general, the area is natural appearing and the area's long term ecological processes are intact and functioning. There is evidence of historic logging and fire occurrence. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements including fencing can be found in the area. There are approximately 500 acres of land previously managed for timber production. Approximately one mile of overhead telephone line is located along the Pinos Creek area. These improvements represent a departure from natural conditions in the area.

The CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened) and Mexican Spotted owl. The CRA contains year round mule deer and elk range and production. The CRA provides big game refuge and is popular with bow hunters.

The Bennett Mountain portion of the CRA traverses low elevation terrain (foothills) with pinyon-juniper and ponderosa pine stands to mid-elevation mountainous terrain comprised of Douglas-fir and aspen stands to high elevation Engelmann spruce/fir stands interspersed with aspen. The Blowout Pass-Willow Creek portion of the CRA is comprised of numerous steep-sided drainages with Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands with intermingled aspen stands. The Lion Point-Greenie Mountain portion of the CRA is comprised of low-elevation terrain with pinyon juniper stands and several deep canyons emanating from Greenie Mountain. The upper-elevations of Green Ridge and Lion Point have Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands interspersed with aspen.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Away from heavy motorized use, trails, and other improvements, some opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation can be found. There are approximately 44 miles of motorized trails and 28 miles of non-motorized trails within the CRA.

Outfitters and guides have special use permits for summer/fall backcountry activities and fall hunting. Motorized access is allowed for range improvements.

#### *Unique Features*

Rio Grande cutthroat trout can be found in this area, and lower elevation ecosystem are recognized as unique features within the area. 1391.73 acres of this CRA are within a Research Natural Area (RNA).

Traditional and cultural sites are found here and throughout the Rio Grande National Forest.

#### *Manageability*

Some areas may be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to existing use and motorized and non-motorized activity. There are private in-holdings within the CRA that may pose management challenges related to access and use.



# CONEJOS PEAK RANGER DISTRICT

## Polygon 52

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 18,750 acre area is located in the south central portion of the Rio Grande National Forest and is administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The area contains the Wightman Fork to Lookout (5,700 acres) and Wightman Fork/Upper Burro CRAs (6,700 acres).

These CRAs are located in Conejos County and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is located on the north side of the Alamosa River. NFSR 250 runs along the river corridor. This road and private parcels along segments of the river corridor separate this roadless area from Silver Lakes/Stunner CRA on the south side of the river corridor. The Wightman Fork/Upper Burro is between two other CRAs on the north side of the river; separated from Wightman Fork to Lookout CRA by a strip of private land; on its eastern side, it is separated from Bennett Mountain CRA by NFSR 280. Its southeastern boundary is adjacent to private lands within the river corridor. A two mile stretch of motorized NFST 700 (Dry Creek) is within the area.

The Wightman Fork to Lookout CRA is separated from the Wightman Fork/Upper Burro CRA on its eastern boundary by a strip of private land. A portion of its western boundary and northern boundary are adjacent to private land. The closest access routes are NFSRs 250 (Alamosa-Conejos River Road), which is adjacent to this area's southern boundary, NFSR 244 (Wightman Fork Road) and NFSR 230 (Summitville Road) at its northern boundary. There are no NFSTs within the area.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Both CRAs have long term, intact functioning ecological processes. The landscape is relatively natural appearing with minimal human disturbance. Historical mining and timber harvest are evident within the CRA. Approximately 135 acres were previously managed for timber harvest. This CRA provides potential habitat and denning areas for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). This CRA is close to a current population. Bighorn sheep occupy the CRA which is a key habitat area for this species.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Because of the limited access and lack of NFSTs within the area, the semi-primitive, non-motorized setting provides opportunities for remoteness and solitude. There is evidence of motorized use on north end of this area. The area provides non-motorized recreational opportunities with very limited activities (fishing and hunting) taking place due to its steep terrain and no NFSTs. Fall outfitter and guide activities are permitted which may impact opportunities for solitude. Portions of three grazing allotments are within the area. Livestock grazing occurs and motorized access is authorized for range improvements, including fencing.

### *Unique Features*

The Blowout Pass Special Interest Area portion of the CRA, within the CRA, is an area of hydrothermically altered volcanic rock displays with vivid red, orange, and yellow soils in a rugged, highly eroded setting. Otherwise, no unique features are known to be within the area.

### *Manageability*

It may be difficult to manage this area to preserve wilderness characteristics due a legacy of past mining activity (Wightman Fork is contaminated), private land in-holdings and established motorized use.

## **Polygon 53**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 3,770 acre area is located on the south western boarder of the Rio Grande National Forest. The Summit Peak/Elwood Pass CRAs (3,200 acres) are within this area and lie along the Continental Divide bordering the San Juan National Forest. It is located in Conejos County and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness along its southern boundary and joins the Treasure Mountain CRA # 17 (22,500 acres) on the San Juan National Forest. Its eastern boundary is Rio Grande National Forest lands managed for recreation and general forest activities. General access to this area is from NFSR 250 (Conejos River Road) that parallels the eastern boundary. There are no NFSTs in this area.

Elevations range from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The headwaters of the Alamosa River (Gold Creek, Cascade Creek, Dolores Canyon and Treasure Creek) are within this area.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area appears relatively natural. However, historical mining and timber harvest are evident within the CRA. This CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). Lynx presence in the CRA is documented and it is considered a high use area. The CRA also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten (documented occurrence), and wolverine and other species.

There are approximately six miles of non-motorized trails (including the CDNST).

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation may be found within much of the area, when away from NFSR 250 (sight and sound), or winter motorized uses. There are no NFSTs in this area so opportunities for seclusion can be found once away from adjacent roads.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area may be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to its current and past uses including private in-holdings (access and use issues) and management of the winter motorized use throughout the area. Portions of the Conejos Canyon and Bancos cattle allotments are within this area, however motorized access or improvements are not allowed.

### **Polygon 54**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 20 acre area is located on the western border of the Rio Grande National Forest and is managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The area is adjacent to designated wilderness and shares borders with the San Juan National Forest. Just north of this area is FS road 243.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness and ecological functioning is similar to that of the adjacent South San Juan Wilderness.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for solitude are limited in this area. The small size and narrow shape of the area may make it difficult to get away from sights and sounds of the surrounding roads and uses.

Limited opportunities exist for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities as this area does not offer ample area to escape from road and dispersed recreation developments and activities.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area's small and narrow shape and adjacent road use may make it difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygon 55**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **High-UT** (3,943 acres) wilderness character within the CRA boundaries adjacent to wilderness, and **Low** (3,740 acres) outside the CRA boundaries.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 7,680 acre area is located on the western border of the Rio Grande National Forest. Within this area is the Gold Creek-Cascade Creek CRA (900 acres), located in Conejos County and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The area is adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness on its western boundary. The remainder of the area joins Forest Service lands managed for recreation and general forest activities. The southeastern corner of the CRA borders Platoro Reservoir. This area is

accessed via NFSR 247 (Three Forks Road) and NFSR 245 (Rito Gato) which borders the area's eastern boundary. There are two non-motorized NFSTs (NFST 710 & 713) that provide access into the South San Juan Wilderness from the area. The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. This area characterized by high elevation, mountainous terrain with Engelmann spruce/alpine fir and numerous high elevation parks. The CRA has extensive late-succession spruce-fir and alpine areas.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes. The majority of this area appears relatively natural; however, there is evidence of historical mining and timber harvest (on east side). The area has similar characteristics as the adjacent wilderness. This CRA provides potential habitat and high quality denning habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). The CRA also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: bighorn sheep, American marten, and American three-toed woodpecker. It is a very important area for bighorn sheep providing overall range. It provides elk summer range north of the Adams Fork and west of Klondike Mountain. The CRA also provides habitat for various species including, but not limited to black bear, elk, mule deer, mountain lion, and wild turkey.

There is approximately one mile of non-motorized trail. There is about six miles of level one roads in this area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Minimal NFSTs and adjacency to the Wilderness, allows for a sense of seclusion and remoteness when in the area. Away from the Wilderness, opportunities decline. Livestock grazing occurs and range improvements include fencing which could impact solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities in isolated areas.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique features are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

The ability to manage for wilderness characteristics is possible in some areas, especially in the CRA adjacent to the wilderness area. Topography precludes much risk of motorized incursions, but sounds from adjacent roads could present challenges when managing for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Private inholdings exist within the boundaries which may present some management challenges related to use and access.

### **Polygon 56**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 12,020 acre polygon is located on the south west border of the Rio Grande National Forest. The Silver Lake-Stunner CRA (5,800 acres) is within this area and is located in Conejos County and

administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is on the south side of the Alamosa River. NFSR 250 runs along the river corridor. This road and private parcels along segments of the river corridor separate this roadless area from three other CRAs on the north side of the river. The south boundary and most of the northern boundary of the CRA is adjacent to Forest Service lands managed for recreation and general forest activities. The northeastern part of the CRA is adjacent to private land along the river.

The following roads are within close proximity to this area NFSR 250 (Alamosa River Road) near the area's northern boundary; NFSR 260 (Silver Lakes Road ) adjacent to its eastern boundary and NFSR 257 (Kerr Lake Road) providing access near the area's western boundary.

The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area has long and deep forested canyons. A majority of the area is comprised of Engelmann spruce/alpine fir stands with some interspersed Aspen stands.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area is relatively natural appearing with the exception of historical timber harvest, roads, and private property development. Approximately 50 acres were previously managed for timber harvest. There is a total of 7.4 miles of level one roads and two miles of motorized trail.

This area provides potential habitat and denning areas for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). The CRA contains mule deer and elk range and productions areas. Bighorn sheep occupy the CRA which is a key habitat area for this species.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Private in-holdings (Cornwalls Nose - Castlemann Gulch) and motorized trails may limit opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation in the area. Popular primitive recreation activities in this area include fishing and hunting.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses (in-holdings, road access, and motorized trails) in and adjacent to the area may make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult in this area.

### **Polygon 57**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **High** wilderness character (3,330 acres) within the CRA and adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness, and **Low** (2,120 acres) outside the CRA.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,460 acre area is located on the southwest border of the Rio Grande National Forest and managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. This area also contains the Tobacco Lake CRA (3,300 acres) which is in Conejos County. It is adjacent to the San Juan Wilderness area on the southern boundary, Platoro Reservoir on its western boundary and Forest Service lands managed for recreation

and general forest activities along the remaining boundaries. There is some private land adjacent to the CRA on the northeastern corner.

General access to this area is by NFSR 105/I 00 on the area's eastern boundary and NFSR 247-T adjacent to its western boundary. NFST 150 (Big Lake), a motorized trail, is within the area. The CRA consists of steep drainages and hillsides not conducive to travel by vehicles. This area is characterized by high-elevation mountainous terrain with Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir stands intermingled with large, open meadows and steep drainages sloping into Platoro Reservoir.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The area's landscape is relatively natural in appearance with minimal human disturbance. However historical mining, water developments (dams, ditches and pipelines encompass approximately 420 acres), and timber harvest are evident in some places within the CRA.

This CRA contains probable Canada lynx denning sites and the steep north facing slopes and drainages are potential lynx reproduction sites and hunting grounds. The CRA is also a key area for bighorn sheep and provides potential habitat for the American marten and wolverine (Forest Service sensitive species). The Canon Diablo area provides elk summer range.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to few roads, trails, or other uses within the area, one can obtain a sense of seclusion and solitude in the area: especially when adjacent to the wilderness or in the CRA.

#### *Unique Features*

Approximately 60 acres of the CRA are in forest plan management area, Eligible Wild Rivers.

#### *Manageability*

Managing to preserve the areas wilderness character is possible, especially in the CRA and adjacent to the Wilderness. Excluding Platoro Reservoir from the area would improve the areas manageability for wilderness character.

### **Polygon 58.a, 58.b, 58.c**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

Totaling approximately 70 acres, these three areas are located on the southwest side of the Rio Grande National Forest and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District in Rio Grande County. It is adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness on the southwest boundary. No major roads go through these areas, however there are several roads surrounding the three areas.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Due to affects from adjacent roads, apparent naturalness is low throughout the area (need additional input on plant communities, improvements, and ecological functioning).

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Due to small size and nearby roads, these areas have minimal opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. Several horse and hiking trails provide access to the area.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

This area would be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics because of adjacent roads and small size.

## **Polygon 59**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Moderate** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 36,960 acre area is located in the south central portion of the Rio Grande National Forest and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It contains the Fox Creek CRA (6,100 acres). This CRA is located in Conejos County and is also administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The CRA runs along the east side of the Conejos River. The river corridor essentially separates this CRA from the South San Juan wilderness. State and BLM land are adjacent to these areas along the area's eastern boundary. General access to the CRA is provided by NFSR 250 (Alamosa-Conejos River Road) which encompasses these areas on the north, west, and south. Due to the steep terrain associated with the river canyon walls, suitable access routes from NFSR 250 are limited. Existing four-wheel drive roads provide closer access. These include NFSR 101 (Fox Creek Road), NFSR 240 (La Jara Creek Road) accessing Willow Mountain, NFSR 248 (Jim Creek Road) and NFSR 249 (Bancos) accessing the Fox Creek area, and NFSR 259 accessing the Alamosa River area. Both motorized and non-motorized opportunities are provided on NFSTs and non-NFSTs. NFSR 260 (Silver Lakes Road) provides access to Willow Mountain on the area's north and west boundary.

The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area consists of steep hillsides on the northeast rim of the Conejos River drainage which are characterized by gentle to steep alpine slopes and ridges with stands of aspen, Engelmann spruce—subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, and ponderosa pine. The forested areas are interspersed with fescue grassland and shrublands.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The area is relatively natural in appearance with the exceptions of livestock grazing improvements and evidence of historical timber harvesting and mining activities.

This CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). The CRA is most notable for bighorn sheep which use the entire area for winter range and production. It provides some drier country utilized by species such as green-tailed towhees.

These areas contain big-game habitat that provides hunting opportunities in the fall.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Horseback riding, viewing scenery, stream fishing, motorcycling, ATV use, and mountain biking all occur within the area. The use of motorcycle trails throughout the area would impact opportunities for solitude. Motorized recreation would not be allowed if the area were managed as wilderness, so opportunities for solitude would likely increase. Due to the area's large size, a feeling of remoteness as well as the ability to pursue primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities exists away from roads and motorized uses.

### *Unique Features*

Forest Service lands along the west boundary of the CRA are managed for wild and scenic/recreation River. Approximately 500 acres of the CRA are in forest plan management area, Designated and Eligible Recreation Rivers. The CRA borders the La Jara Reservoir State Wildlife Area on its southeastern corner.

The Devil's Hole Special Interest Area is also located in this area.

### *Manageability*

The presence and extent of other uses in and adjacent to the area would make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. Current grazing management activities allow for motorized access and mechanized equipment to maintain grazing developments such as fences and water developments within the area.

ATV use, as well as the close proximity to roads would pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass into the area.

## **Polygon 60**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **Low** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,550 acre area is located in the southeast corner of the Rio Grande National Forest and is managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District in Rio Grande County. The area is bordered by several NFSR roads including 252.1B, 253 and 254. The area is located south of the Alamosa River and just west of Capulin.

### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness in this area is moderate due to existing use and private property. Additionally, there are several user created roads and trails that take away from the natural character of the area. This area is characterized by Engelmann Spruce plant communities on mountain slopes and supports some Pinyon in the rocky foothills.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Roading and uses within the area limit opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation in the area.



### *Unique Features*

No unique features are noted for this area.

### *Manageability*

Overall, the ability to manage for wilderness characteristics would be difficult in this area. Private inholdings and user created roads would likely pose management challenges related to use and access in the area.

## **Polygon 61**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has **High** wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

This approximately 1,550 acre area is located on the southwest border of the Rio Grande National Forest and managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. In addition, the Conejos River/Lake Fork (900 acres) and Spectacle Lake CRA (600 acres) are both located in Conejos County, Colorado and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is bounded by the South San Juan Wilderness to the south and west and the Conejos River to the north and east. General access to this area is from NFSR 250 (Conejos River Road) which parallels the eastern boundary. Steep hillsides are on either side of the Conejos River drainage limiting access to the CRA.

The CRA is within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. The area is characterized as a long, narrow, and steep-sided canyon with the Conejos River traversing its entire length. The steep-sided canyons have stands of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir interspersed with aspen stands and meadows. Riparian and cottonwood are found by the river.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The majority of the area appears natural with the exception of grazing activities and historical mining and timber harvest within the CRA. There is also five miles of an over-head telephone line which detract from naturalness in that area.

This CRA provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened). Lynx presence in the CRA is documented. The steep north-facing slopes and drainages are potential reproduction and hunting sites. The CRA also provides potential habitat for the following Forest Service sensitive species: goshawk (documented), American marten (documented), and bighorn sheep (potential seasonal range). Other notable species include black bear, mule deer, and elk. Steep north-facing hillsides provide areas of cover and forage for elk; the area is migratory hunting grounds for peregrine falcon. There are peregrine falcon nests on adjacent cliffs to the east.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and unconfined recreation are high through the area due to steep and rugged terrain and a lack of Forest trails. Overall, recreation use is minimal and a feeling of remoteness and seclusion can be experienced throughout much of the area. Some uses may impact

solitude including authorized motorized access and improvements for grazing activities and the proximity of NFSR 250 (sight and sound).

#### *Unique Features*

Approximately 870 acres of the CRA are in forest plan management area, designated and eligible Recreation Rivers. No other unique qualities are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing for wilderness character is possible throughout majority of the area with the exception of challenges related to livestock grazing activities, a private inholding, and maintenance of an overhead telephone line.

Further, there is a high potential for oil and gas leasing which if pursued, could change the character of the area.

### **Polygon 62**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 5,910 acre area is on the south end of the Rio Grande National Forest and managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It is within Rio Grande County. The area is surrounded by NFSR 248 and 249 and has a motorized trail that provides access through the area.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

Apparent naturalness in this area is low due to visual human improvements. There are approximately 7.3 miles of motorized trails.

The area is characterized by Engelmann Spruce and Arizona Fescue plant communities on mountain slopes.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Overall, the area provides opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation with a few exceptions in isolated areas. NFSR's 248 and 249 border the area, impacting a traveler's opportunity to experience unconfined recreation as well as impacting a feeling of solitude and remoteness when motorized sounds can be heard. There are 7.3 miles of motorized trail that runs along the western edge of the area that could further impact opportunities for solitude (sites and sound).

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

Managing the area to preserve wilderness characteristics may be difficult in this area. Motorcycle/ATV use, as well as close proximity to roads could pose management challenges related to vehicle encroachment and motorized trespass.

Management by the Fish and Wildlife Service of adjacent land may also effect the manageability of this area to preserve wilderness characteristics.

### **Polygon 63.a**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **High** degree of wilderness character in the Cumbres CRA and a **Moderate** degree of wilderness character elsewhere.

#### *Description/location*

This approximately 34,160 acre area is located on the southernmost edge of the Rio Grande National Forest near the New Mexico border. This area consists of the Chama Basin (21,600 acres) and Cumbres (10,400 acres) CRAs and managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District.

The Chama Basin CRA is located in both Conejos County Colorado, and Archuleta County, Colorado. It is adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness area on its northeastern boundary. The southeastern boundary is Rio Grande National Forest lands prescribed for recreation and general forest activities. The remaining adjacent lands are private land (Tierra Amarilla Land Grant). The Chama Basin is a confined basin accessible by one road and inaccessible during winter months. NFSR 121 accesses the western portion of the Chama Basin Area from the south. A jeep route accesses the area from the Tierra Amarilla Grant (private land). There are three NFSTs, 740, 741, and 124, that provide both motorized and non-motorized access in the area.

The Cumbres CRA is located in Conejos County Colorado, and is administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. It consists of steep hillsides and cliffs adjacent to the South San Juan Wilderness boundary on its northern boundary. The terrain within the CRA is not conducive to travel by vehicles, however, several access roads border or are adjacent to the CRA boundary, including NFSR 118 (Trujillo Meadows Road -level 3), NFSR 118.1, NFSR 119 (Cumbres), NFSR 114.1 (La Manga) and NFSR 128.1 (Elk Creek). Several NFSTs within the area provide motorized and non-motorized access.

The CRAs are within South-Central Highlands Eco-Section (M331G) with elevations ranging from 7,545 to 14,110 feet. Chama Basin can be generally characterized as moderate to steep forested mountain slopes with dissected drainages. Vegetation is mainly aspen and Engelmann spruce. The Cumbres area is characterized by moderate to steep forested mountain slopes with park-like benches and alpine plateaus with long narrow drainages. Vegetation is primarily spruce/fir.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area has long term, intact, and functioning ecological processes. Most of the area and throughout the CRAs is natural in appearance. There is some evidence of historical mining, timber harvest, roads, and past fire activity in the CRAs. More recent timber harvest occurred within the CRA (La Manga sale) as well as 1970s single tree selection cuts and precommercial thinning. There is a dam and a reservoir in the area. Cattle and sheep grazing are permitted in the area and some range improvements include fencing and water development.

The area provides potential habitat for the federally listed Canada lynx (threatened), Mexican spotted owl (threatened) and southwestern willow flycatcher (endangered). This is a high use area for lynx. It functions as a lynx corridor to New Mexico. Lynx have been reestablished in the South San Juan

Mountains and have been documented utilizing nearby range. The Chama Basin could provide potential hunting and breeding areas. The CRA is a considered a special wildlife area for bighorn sheep. It provides mule deer summer range, and elk production areas near Duck and Rock lakes. The steep north facing hillsides also provide areas of cover and refuge for elk. It is considered overall range for black bear.

The Chamas Basin CRA has an area with waterfalls and a rugged landscape expanding into a riparian system. This combination provides at least two black swift breeding sites, habitats for southwestern willow flycatchers, as well as Wilson's warbler, Lincoln's sparrow and others passerine species. The Rio de Los Pinos River from the headwaters to the waterfall at the wilderness boundary contains an introduced population of pure Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The Wolf Creek headwaters start just east of the southern boundary of the Cumbres CRA. From the headwaters downstream to a culvert barrier at the Cumbres & Toltec Railroad crossing contains a wild population of pure Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

There are approximately 14 miles of non-motorized trails (including the CDNST). The Cumbes has approximately 17 miles of motorized trails and 5 miles of non-motorized trails.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

Once away from the trails and roads, one can get a feeling of remoteness and seclusion. Motorized access is allowed for some range improvements which could affect wilderness solitude. Recreational opportunities include hiking, horseback riding, hunting, mountain biking and motorcycle riding. The Continental Divide National Scenic trail attracts hikers and mountain bike users to the area. There is a permitted recreation event that occurs every three years.

#### *Unique Features*

Approximately 3,200 acres of the Chamas Basin CRA is within forest plan management area, Designated and Eligible Scenic Rivers. Land grants are also found within the area.

#### *Manageability*

This area could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics, especially if the Cumbres CRA (high degree of wilderness character) is analyzed separately from the remainder of the area.

Some management challenges exist due to the infrastructure and use already associated with the area. There is a reservoir and dam as well as several private land in-holdings that could present challenges related to access, use and maintenance. The mineral rights in Chama Basin are privately owned, and there is interest to explore the area's mineral potential. If exploratory results are positive, future development may occur which could impact the area's natural landscape and primitive character. There is a high potential for oil and gas leasing, however there are no leases or nominations at this time.

Overall the area should be analyzed as two polygons due to Cumbres CRA having higher wilderness characteristics than the surrounding areas.

#### **Polygon 63.b and 63.c**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Moderate** degree of wilderness character.

#### *Description/location*

These two areas total approximately 230 acres and are located on the southern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest, managed by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The New Mexico border is just south of this area as well as the adjacent South San Juan Wilderness.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

The apparent naturalness of this area is similar to the adjacent wilderness. There are minimal improvements in the area (.1 miles of non-motorized trails and .2 miles of level one roads). The area is characterized by Willows and Sedges on floodplains as well as Engelmann Spruce on landslides.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

When coupled with the adjacent wilderness, visitors could experience solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

#### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

#### *Manageability*

Small size and adjacent private land management may make managing the area to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult.

### **Polygon 64**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low/Moderate** degree of wilderness character. Recommend to evaluate this polygon in three sections: south of railroad, between railroad and 107 road, and north of 107 road. **Low**, may be moderate if adjacent lands on Carson have wilderness character

#### *Description/location*

This 26,030 acre area is located on the most southern end of the Rio Grande National Forest bordering New Mexico. The area is administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The Carson National Forest lies just below the border with the Spruce Hole/Sheep Creek CRA which is located nearby.

#### *Apparent naturalness*

This area is relatively natural in appearance. There is some evidence of mining and active railroads in the southern portion. North of the railroad there are some non-native lodgepole plantations. The majority of the vegetation consists of Arizona Fescue and Aspen on mountain slopes. There are about 2 miles of level one roads in the area.

#### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area provides opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation when away from the active railroad, adjacent roads, and other improvements

### *Unique Features*

There is eligible WSR in the lower section of this area.

### *Manageability*

This area could be difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics due to the roads and active railroad system. The polygon may be divided into three sections to better reflect the wilderness character in each section. Suggested divisions are as follows: south of railroad, between railroad and 107 road, and north of 107 road). North of 107 has spruce hole/sheep creek roadless area.

## **Polygon 65 & 66**

Preliminary Evaluation Result: This area has a **Low** degree of wilderness character.

### *Description/location*

The total acreage of these areas is approximately 4,360 acres. It is located in the southern portion of the Rio Grande National Forest and administered by the Conejos Peak Ranger District. The Carson National Forest is just south of this area across the New Mexico border. Just north of these two areas is Highway 17. Other FS roads in the area include 107 and 117 and 117.1A.

### *Apparent naturalness*

The apparent naturalness is low throughout this area due to noticeable features in the southern portion of the area (additional details needed from specialists on noticeable features and plant communities/ecological functioning). There are approximately 2.8 miles of non-motorized trails in the area. The vegetation type consists mostly of Arizona and Thurber Fescue on mountain slopes.

### *Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation*

This area provides minimal opportunity for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. Adjacent roads and noticeable features in the southern portion may impact a feeling of solitude or remoteness from civilization.

### *Unique Features*

No unique qualities are known to be in this area.

### *Manageability*

Adjacent roads and past management practices may make it difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics.



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